

BELARUS AND THE WORLD: GEOPOLITICAL CHOICE AND SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMY AND CULTURE

The survey “Belarus and the World: Geopolitical Choice and Security in the Context of Economy and Culture” was conducted by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) and NovAK axiometrical research laboratory in the first half of 2010. The objective of the survey was to identify and find reasons behind the geopolitical preferences of Belarusian society, define the geopolitical and cultural determinants of choice of foreign political unions and security patterns. The contributors attempted to find all-new answers to the pivotal questions of the Belarusian analytical community’s research agenda, namely:

- To what extent is the collective consciousness of contemporary Belarusian society receptive to the political and cultural imperatives that are traditionally interpreted as “European values”?
- To what extent is the geopolitical choice of Belarusians between Russia and the European Union dependent on economic and socio-cultural (value-driven) factors?
- To what extent can the geopolitical choice be transformed by external factors, by media and economic policies, as well as by policies in the sphere of human contacts?
- How efficient is the media support for the European Union’s policy on Belarus?

The results of the survey are presented as a report on the findings of the nationwide opinion poll carried out in January-February 2010 based on a representative sample of 1,071 respondents.

The study has revealed the following patterns:

- **The markedly low level of understanding of institutional ties between Belarus and the European Union** still remains. Belarusians’ awareness of the Eastern Partnership Initiative is almost non-existent, despite the positive image of the program both in the official and alternative discourse.
- **The EU communication approach toward Belarusian society has failed** (if such a policy existed at all). The Belarusian authorities outplayed the EU in giving their interpretations of the reasons why the Union had imposed sanctions against Belarusian high officials. The suspension of sanctions was perceived by Belarusian society as the white flag showed by the EU.
- The “bipolarity” of Belarus’ geopolitical orientation persists. **The geopolitical choice is motivated by two factors – the social dynamism of the respondents** (age- and education-based ability to take the opportunities offered by a hypothetical geopolitical turn) and, correspondingly, their **ability to weigh the potential gains and losses resulting from this or that geopolitical scenario**. The value motivation of the geopolitical choice is virtually lacking.

- **Access to alternative sources of information about the EU and possibility of free travel within the Union secure a 20% to 30% growth in pro-European attitudes in each and every social group.** At the same time, we maintain that the attempts to “Europeanize” mass consciousness via external electronic media (radio and television programs broadcast from abroad) failed miserably. The Internet media showed a better dynamism due to their network nature and proved to be more efficient “Europeanizers”.

- In the context of the compatibility of the political culture of **Belarusian society and “European values”, Belarusian society is ready to adopt “political” European values** (respect for political and civil freedoms) to a much greater extent than “cultural” values (respect for personal autonomy, choice of lifestyle, confession, behavior, sexual orientation, etc.)

BISS and NOVAK believe the findings and conclusions of the survey will be helpful to a wide audience, especially the analytical community and political forces, primarily the presidential candidates who will emphasize external policy and economics in their election programs, journalists, civil society, especially the organizations working on promoting Belarus’ engagement with the European Union. BISS is ready to provide additional consultations to all concerned parties.

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CHAPTER 1. EU AND EUROPEANS AS SEEN BY BELARUSIANS

The topic of Belarusian-European relations has lately been brought to the foreground of political discourse due to well-known recent foreign and domestic political transformations. However, the perception of EU policies on Belarus directly depends on the information about the EU itself and the interaction between Brussels and Minsk that citizens receive. In order to look into the connection between awareness and understanding, we studied the following:

- Awareness of Belarusian citizens of the institutional aspects of the Belarus-EU engagement;
- Perception by Belarusian citizens of EU policies on Belarus.

Main conclusions:

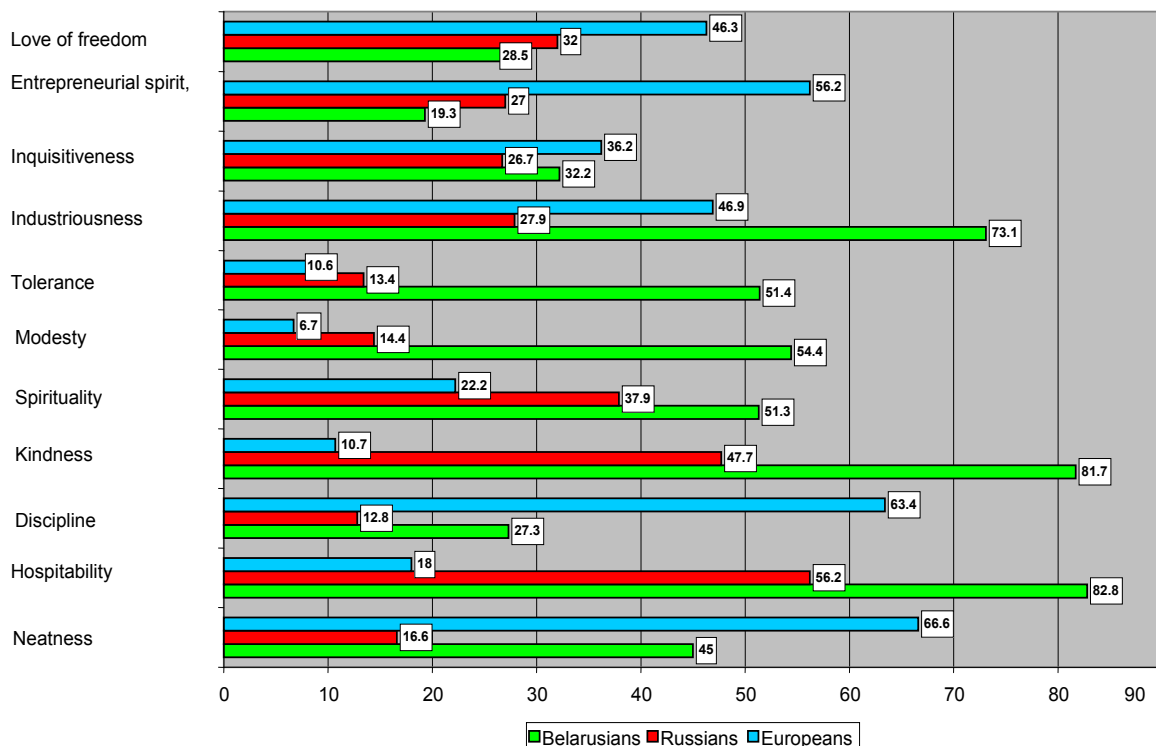
- The degree of understanding of the institutional connections between Belarus and the EU is quite low, as many Belarusians believe the country is taking part or is member to the programs and institutions that Belarus has been expelled from, while being unaware of the programs in which Belarus does take part. For instance, people's awareness of the Eastern Partnership Initiative is very low, despite the positive image of the program promoted both in the official and alternative discourse.
- Belarusians have a somewhat more favorable attitude to the economic prospects of the Eastern Partnership than membership in the European Union.
- The EU communication policy on Belarusian society has definitely failed (if such a policy was pursued at all). The basic message of the Union never reached even the most appreciative public – advocates of Belarus' membership in the European Union and the bedrock audience of the alternative Belarusian media.
- On the other hand, those aware of the EU policy vis-à-vis Belarus said they were convinced it was futile.
- The Belarusian authorities beat the EU hands down when presenting their reasons behind the imposition of sanctions against the top Belarusian officials. When it saw the sanctions suspended, the public interpreted the move as a crushing defeat of the Union.
- Access to alternative sources of information about the EU and possibility of free travel in the Union increase pro-European attitudes in all social groups with no exception by an estimated 20% to 30%. At the same time, we maintain that the attempts to "Europeanize" collective consciousness via foreign electronic media (radio stations and television channels broadcast from abroad) failed dismally. The Internet media with its extensive network opportunities showed a better dynamism and proved to be more efficient "Europeanizers".

Belarusian neighbors through the lens of stereotypes

A recent study of our colleagues found out that only one in four Belarusians believes they are closer to Europeans than to Russians by their character and mentality¹. However, why, despite this apparent sense of commonness, is blatant anti-Russian propaganda so often spread in Belarus every time the Minsk-Moscow relations get sour? Where exactly do the Belarusians feel close to Russia? Is there an unsurpassable “cultural distance” and a the feeling of “otherness”? We offer our answers to these questions based on Belarusians’ evaluation of their own national character and their perception of their close neighbors.

Our research revealed a high degree of apologetic moods and narcissism in the self-evaluation of the Belarusian respondents. Asked which traits are most typical of the Belarusians, Russians and Europeans, Belarusians tend to emphasize their positive spiritual and moral features (hospitality, kindness, modesty, tolerance, spirituality) and work ethics (industry, spirituality). Belarusians’ evaluation of the Russians reveals a similar structure of moral qualities, whereas the labor ethics of the eastern neighbors are not something Belarusians are impressed with. When assessing the positive traits of the Europeans, the Belarusian respondents noted neatness, discipline, entrepreneurial spirit and industriousness – the evaluation is not uniform here.

Which national character traits are most typical of...



When it comes to negative qualities, Belarusians’ perception of the Russians is quite indicative: more than half of all respondents mentioned laziness as a key feature of the Russian national character (laziness is second only to hospitality in the overall list of positive and negative qualities), almost a third of all respondents named unreliability, and some 20% said nationalism and envy were Russians’ key features. On the whole, **Belarusians “discovered” almost each negative feature in the Russians two to five times as frequently as in themselves.** As for the Europeans, the Belarusian respondents believe their key negative

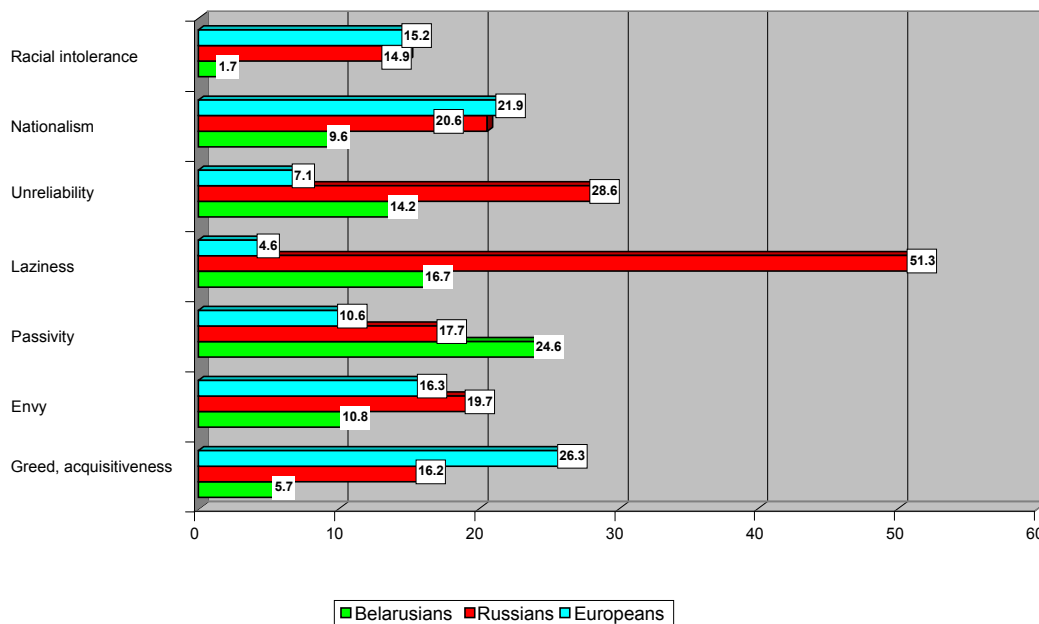
1 <http://www.iiseps.org/data10-13.html>

traits are greed, nationalism and envy.

It is noteworthy that the variations both in the self-evaluation and assessment of others caused by social and demographic characteristics of the respondents were minimal. Young people tend to criticize the Belarusians a bit more, giving slightly more negative features to their compatriots than the average for the sample, whereas senior citizens tend to emphasize the "moral" values of their fellow countrymen (kindness, spirituality, etc.), but these differences are not profound. Those visiting the EU on a regular basis mention slightly fewer negative features of the Europeans, such as nationalism and greed, however, the overall profile of assessments is quite uniform in Belarusian society.

To sum it up: **collective consciousness has built up an image of the Belarusians as "people with a quality mark" as opposed to the Europeans (hard-working misers) and the Russians (spiritual sluggards).** We should also note that whereas the Belarusian respondents easily recognize the Europeans' superiority in certain moral and personal aspects (primarily in work ethics), the Russians are complete outsiders in all nominations. **Despite the "spiritual closeness" to the Russians that all Belarusians undoubtedly feel, public consciousness of the Belarusians has developed a solid image of "otherness", which is efficiently exploited by the official propaganda during critical phases of Belarus' relations with Moscow.**

Which national character traits are most typical of...

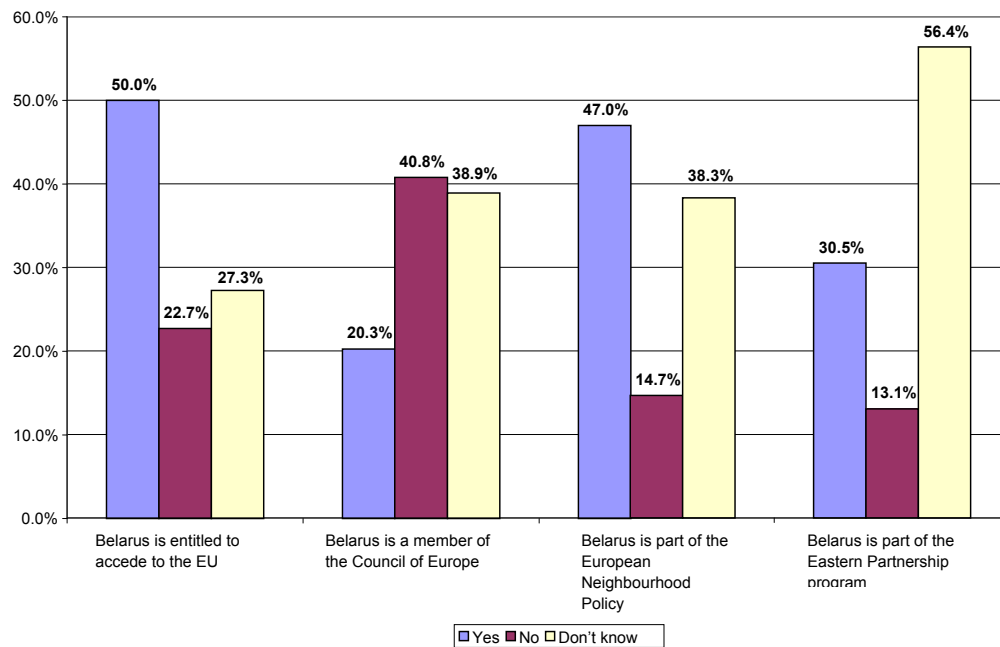


European Union is still terra incognita for most Belarusians

The study showed a quite low level of understanding of the institutional ties between Belarus and the EU. About half of all the respondents believe that Belarus is entitled to accede to the European Union, about 20.3% responded in the affirmative when asked whether Belarus is member of the Council of Europe. About half of them (46.9%) think Belarus is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and 15% believe it is not. The large share of those who did not answer these questions – 38.9% and 39.3%, respectively – is quite indicative. Interestingly, more "advanced" and better informed population groups made more mistakes – 23% of the young, 21.2% of the respondents with higher education and 22.2% of those having access to

alternative sources of information about the EU are certain Belarus is a member of the Council of Europe. The group of those sure that Belarus is member of the European Neighbourhood Policy includes 58.4% of Minsk residents, 58.1% of Belarusians with higher education, 42.1% of young people aged under 24 and 54% of those who have access to the alternative media. **The abundance of mistakes proves that even the most “advanced” population groups fail to follow the twists and turns of the Belarusian relations with the EU, whereas their answers look a lot more like wishes than educated opinions (or they simply want to show their awareness of the names of the European political institutions – “you heard the song but got it wrong”).**

Awareness of the institutional ties between Belarus and the EU

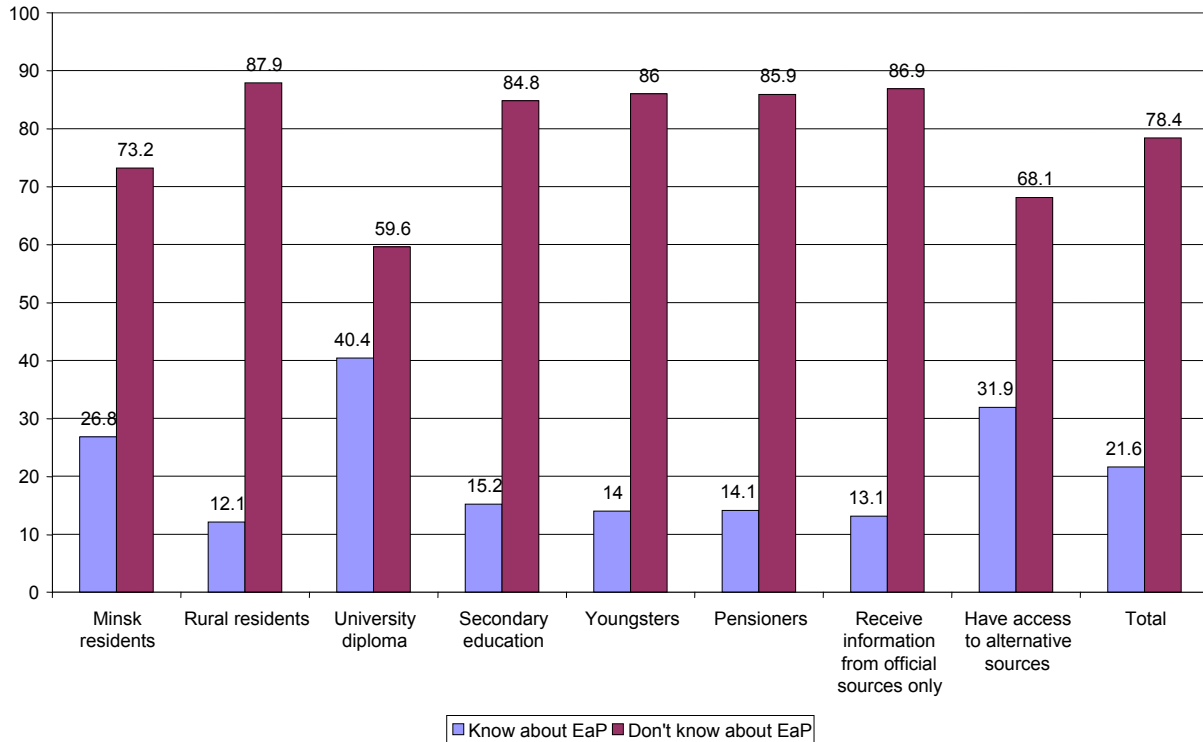


Eastern Partnership – “never heard of it, but we support it.”

Only 21% of the respondents are aware of the Eastern Partnership program, whereas 78% know nothing about it. Thirty per cent believe Belarus is involved in the Eastern Partnership, 13% claim it is not, and 56.4% could not answer. It is noteworthy that despite the generally positive attitude of the official media to the European initiative, those who have access only to the state-run media are almost unaware of the EaP, with only 13.1% admitting they have heard about it; the share of those aware of the EaP in the group that have access to alternative information about the EU is much higher, at 31.6%. The group aware of the Eastern Partnership includes 40.4% of respondents with higher education, 26.8% of Minsk residents and 25.8% of middle-aged persons. The proportion of the young that have some knowledge about the EaP, at 14%, is almost equal to that in the group of senior citizens/pensioners, standing at 14.1%. Those having access to alternative sources of information are aware of the Eastern Partnership to a slightly higher degree than the mean for the sample; nevertheless, only 31.6% of those having access to alternative information about the EU are aware of the EaP. The proportion of the respondents who believe Belarus is part of the EaP are once again highest in the group of persons with higher education, standing at 46.5%, in the group of residents of the city of Minsk and other large settlements, at 33.8% and 35.5%, respectively, and in the category of

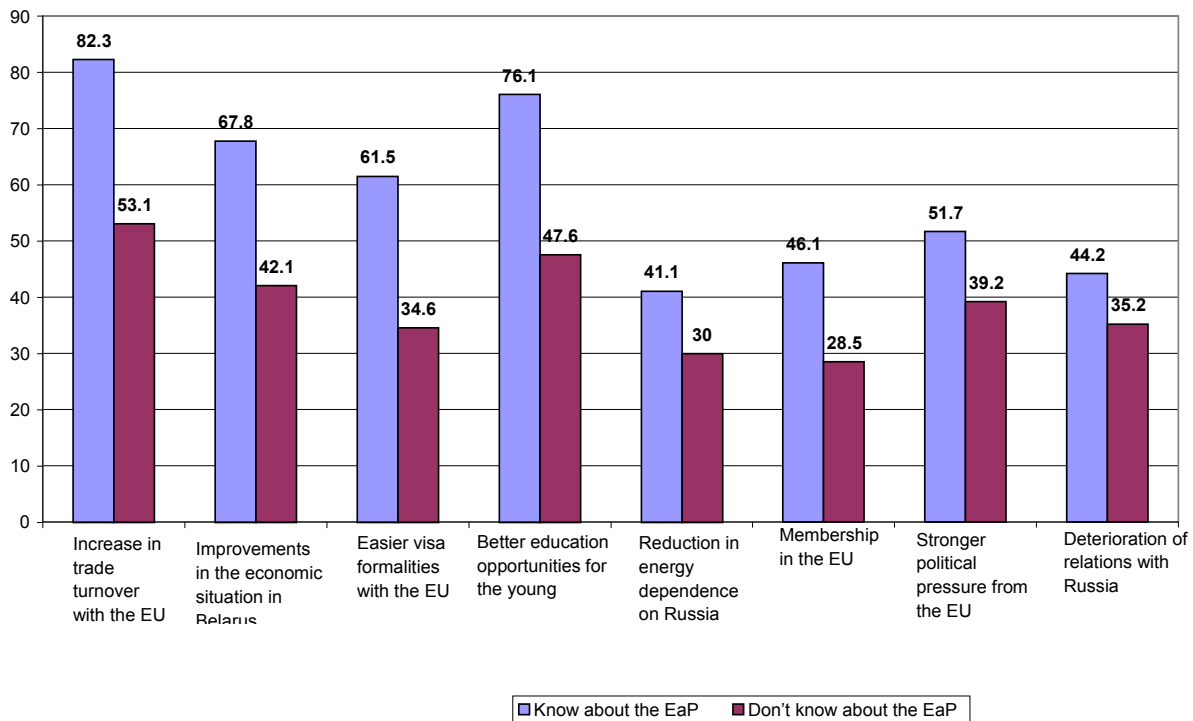
persons who have access to alternative information about the EU, at 41.8%. The youth and pensioners again demonstrated roughly the same degree of awareness, at 26.1% and 25.7%, respectively).

Awareness about the Eastern Partnership Program



The Belarusian population anticipates that the Eastern Partnership will bring about changes in a few areas: 59.4% of all the respondents are absolutely or rather certain the trade turnover between Belarus and the European Union will expand as a result of the EaP; 57.6% expect improvements in the domestic economic situation; and 25.6% doubt this. Another positive result of the implementation of EaP projects, according to 40.5% of respondents, is a likely abolition of visa formalities between Belarus and the EU, while 28.9% believe the move would be impossible or highly unlikely. Better opportunities for young people to have education in the European Union are mentioned by 53.6% of respondents, and 18% say there is hardly any chance. Furthermore, 32.6% of respondents believe it possible or probable that the energy dependence on Russia will decrease owing to the EaP, however, 37.6% have their doubts. Almost the same proportions apply to the question about the likelihood of Belarus' joining the European Union (32.2% think it is possible, and 35.5% believe this scenario is unlikely or impossible). More than a third of all respondents believe the Eastern Partnership will facilitate economic improvements in Belarus, some 20% think improvements will be unlikely, and a quarter has no answer. About 48.7% of respondents believe the Eastern Partnership may contribute to deterioration of Belarusian-Russian relations, and 41.9% think the program will become an instrument to enhance the political influence of the Union on Belarus.

Expectations from the Eastern Partnership



Advocates of Belarus' accession to the EU and the respondents who have access to alternative sources of information about the EU tend to expect positive changes resulting from the Eastern Partnership some 10% to 20% more frequently than the mean for the sample (73.1% and 66.8% anticipate an increase in trade turnover, compared to the average for the sample of 59.5%; 65.6% and 57.4% expect general improvements in the economic situation, against 47.6%; 58.6% and 50.6% forecast easier visa formalities, compared to 40.5%; 45.3% and 39.1% expect the energy dependence on Russia will decrease, whereas the average for the sample stands at 32.6%; and 68.6% and 63.6% anticipate better possibilities for education, compared to the average of 53.6%). At the same time, when assessing the potential negative consequences of the EaP, the two groups – supporters of Belarus' joining the European Union and those enjoying access to alternative media – provide almost the same forecasts as the average for the sample (39.6% of Euro-optimists and 40.4% of those with access to alternative information expect a worse political influence on Belarus, as compared to the average of 41.8% for the sample; and 41.7% and 39.9% anticipate a bad spell in relations with Russia, against 37.3%). The socially mobile groups – the young, well-educated and Minsk residents – expect progress in visa formalities, accession to the EU and better chance of European education to a slightly higher degree than all the respondents taken together; differences in the economic expectations from the EaP are insignificant. Those aware of the Eastern Partnership tend to expect both positive and negative changes 10% to 15% more frequently than the average for the sample.

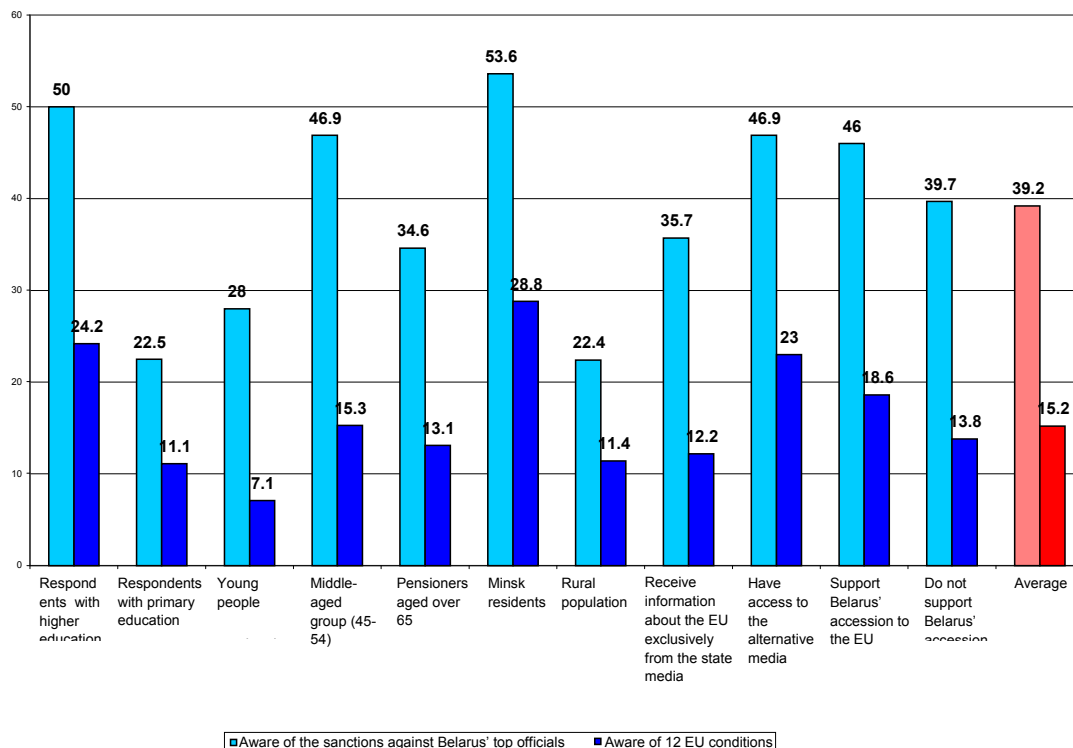
A general conclusion we draw here is that Belarusians on average have a more favorable attitude toward the economic prospects offered by the Eastern Partnership rather than membership in the European Union. On the one hand, this could be a reason why the EaP has not been slammed in the media (except for a few websites of opposition parties), however, on the other hand, the EaP with its low level of conditionality is perceived as a bird in the hand as opposed to membership in the EU, the bird in the bush, the latter being so much harder to catch.

Sanctions and their suspension: the authorities beat the EU in the information warfare

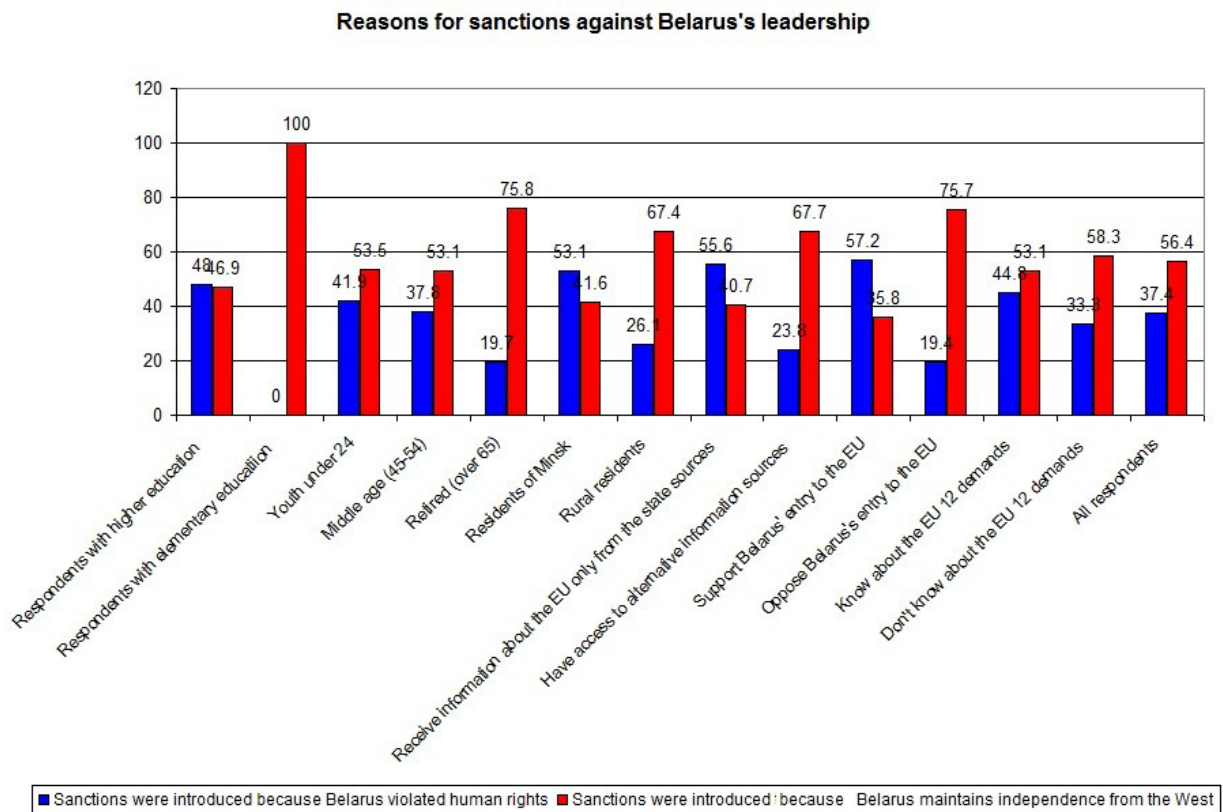
Most of the EU's moves against the Belarusian authorities "stayed away" from the general public, which for the most part remained unaware of the sanctions imposed against top Belarusian officials and the EU conditions for Belarus. Sixty per cent of respondents know nothing about the sanctions the EU imposed against Belarusian officials; more importantly, 85% of respondents are unaware of the 12 requirements the European Union set out for the Belarusian authorities in November 2006. **In conditions of a slanted interpretation of the reasons behind the negative measures vis-à-vis Belarus taken by the European Union, the Belarusian public perceived the sanctions as a mechanism of exerting pressure on the country, whereas the suspension of the sanctions was interpreted as a victory of the Belarusian authorities. Furthermore, the inconsistency of the EU's actions disappointed even the supporters of the European choice who did not believe in the official reason for the suspension of the sanctions.**

The study showed that access to alternative sources of information fostered the awareness of the EU policies on Belarus only slightly. The proportion of those aware of the sanctions in the group of people that get information exclusively from the state media stands at 35.7%, compared to 46.9% in the group of those having access to alternative media. As for the 12 EU conditions, only 12.2% of those who have access to state media only are aware of those, and in the group of people who receive information from alternative sources, the figure stands at 23%, less than a quarter. In the group of Euro-optimists, 46% have heard of the sanctions, and 18.6% know about the 12 EU terms. For Eurosceptics, the figures are at 39.7% and 13.8%. More people with higher education and in the middle-aged group, 50% and 46.9%, are aware of the sanctions than the young, pensioners and people with primary education, 28%, 34.6% and 22.5%, respectively. In the group of respondents aged between 25 and 34, 20.6% have heard something of the 12 conditions of the EU, whereas in the groups of young people and pensioners, only 7.1% and 13.1% are aware of them, respectively. Respondents with higher education are better aware of the 12 conditions than those with secondary and primary education – the figures stand at 24.2%, 11.8% and 11.1%. Minsk residents know more about the sanctions and the 12 conditions – 53.6% and 22.4%, respectively, – than villagers, with 28.8% and 11.4%, respectively.

Awareness of the EU actions vis-à-vis Belarus



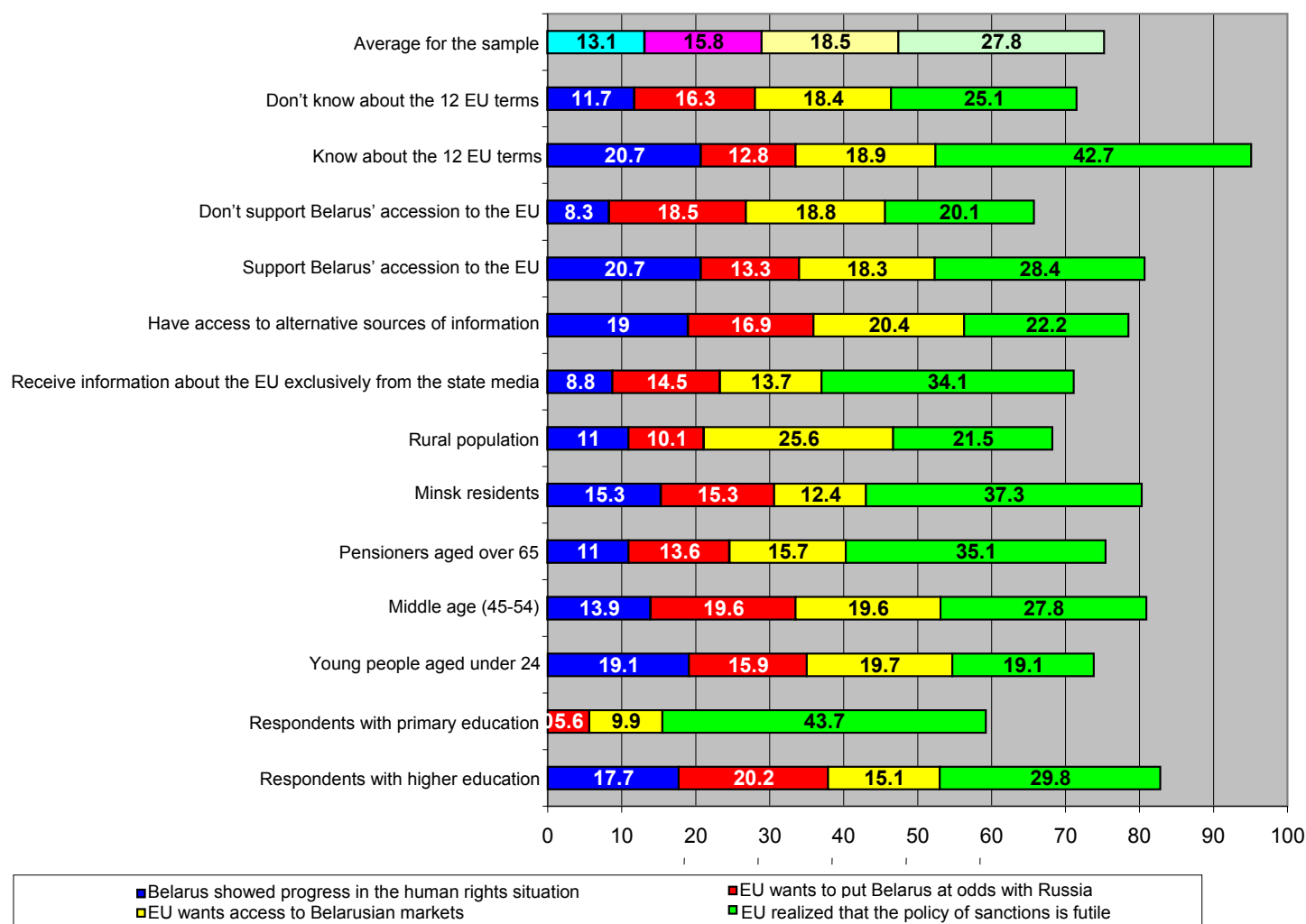
Most of the respondents in the group of those aware of the sanctions, 56.4%, are certain that the sanctions against the top officials of the country were imposed because the Belarusian administration had pursued an independent foreign policy and failed to comply with the political dictate of the West. The version of the EU (that the sanctions were imposed in response to human rights abuse) was "swallowed" by 36.7% of respondents. The version promoted by the state is popular even with pro-European groups. Strikingly, 40.7% of those using alternative sources of information believe Belarus had been "punished" for pursuing an independent policy, although the majority of respondents are certain the sanctions had been caused by violations of human rights (55.6%). The version of the "punishment" for independence is accepted not only by 75.7% of the opponents of EU accession, but also 35.8% of its supporters. Also, 41.6% of Minsk residents and 67.4% of villagers trust in the "punishment for independence" scenario (53.1% and 26.1%, respectively, believe Belarus had been punished for the poor human rights record); 53.5% of the respondents aged under 24 and 75.8% of pensioners Belarusian officials were punished for country's independent stance (41.9% and 19.7%, respectively, think human rights abuse was the reason); finally, 46.9% of the respondents with higher education and 57.6% of those with secondary education think the officials had been banned from the EU for independent policies (48% and 35.2% blame the poor human rights record).



In sum, Belarusian society interpreted the suspension of sanctions in October 2008 as Lukashenko's victory over the EU (28% of the respondents said "the EU understood that the policy of sanctions against Belarus was futile" when asked why the sanctions had been suspended) or tend to see some hidden meaning in the EU actions (18.5% of the respondents said the EU was trying to gain access to the Belarusian market, and 15.8% said the EU was simply adding fuel to the fire of the Belarusian-Russian conflict). Only 13% agreed with the EU official version, that is, that Belarus showed sufficient progress in the human rights situation. Note that the "hidden meaning" theories were accepted both by supporters of the Belarusian authorities, who think the human rights issue is almost non-existent, and opponents of the regime, who say the decision of the European Union following the September 2008 parliamentary election was hypocritical, to say the

least. At the same time, the version about the futility of the sanctions may be supported by some opponents of the authorities who find no sense in the sanctions. It is indicative that of those who knew about the 12 conditions imposed by the EU, almost half (.), or 42.7%, said the sanctions had been suspended because they were ineffective. This opinion was shared by only 25.1% of those who knew nothing about the conditions. **In other words, the awareness of the EU policy on Belarus only convinced the respondents that this policy was futile.**

Opinions about the reasons for suspension of the sanctions in October 2009



Those having access to alternative media and Euro-optimists are more inclined to trust the official reasons for the sanctions promoted by the EU than the average for the sample, 19% and 20.7% of the total, whereas 22.2% of those well-informed and 28.5% of Euro-optimists believe the Belarusian authorities in this matter. The EU version is supported by 8.8% of those receiving information only from the official Belarusian media and 8.5% of Euro-pessimists; the proportions supporting the official version of the Belarusian authorities stand at 34.1% and 33.8%, respectively. Importantly, despite the difference in the perception of the reasons for the suspension of the EU sanctions, even those not brainwashed by the official Belarusian media are in the minority when it comes to accepting the official EU justification, that is, "progress in the human rights situation". The three groups believing that the sanctions were suspended because of improvements in the human rights sector are the young under 24 years of age with 19.1%, persons with higher education with 17.7% and Minsk residents with 15.3%. Nevertheless, even in these groups, more people tend to accept

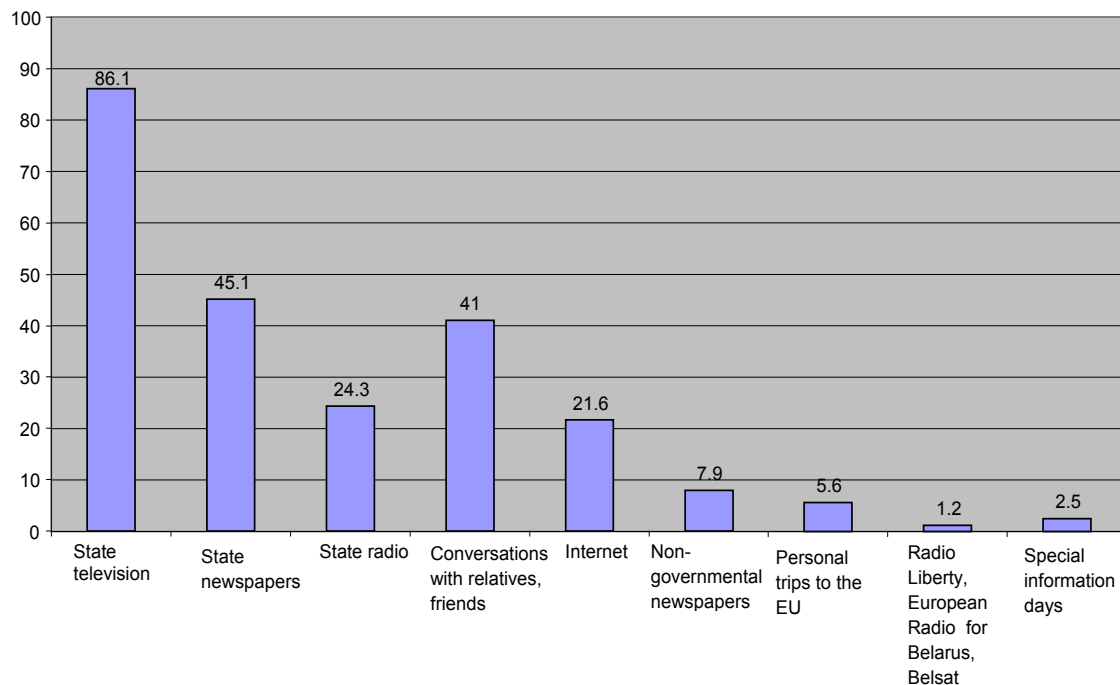
the version of the Belarusian authorities about the futility of the sanctions, 37.3% of Minsk residents and 29.8% of people with higher education. The groups including villagers and people with specialized secondary education tend to believe more than other groups that the EU resorted to the sanctions because it wants the Belarusian market, with proportions being at 25.6% and 22.4%; those suspecting the EU of wishing to escalate Belarus' conflict with Russia dominate in the group of people residing in towns with population of 50,000 and less, 29.9%, respondents aged between 45 and 54, 19.6%, and, strange as it may seem, people with higher education, 20.2%. В версию «наказания» за независимость верят 75.7% противников вступления в ЕС, но и 35.8% его сторонников. В «наказание» за независимость также верят 41.6% минчан и 67.4% жителей сельской местности (в наказание за нарушение прав человека – соответственно 53.1 и 26.1%), 53.5% молодёжи в возрасте до 24 лет и 75.8% – пенсионеров (соответственно 41.9 и 19.7% верят в то, что санкции введены за нарушения прав человека), 46.9% лиц с высшим образованием и 57.6% – средним (соответственно 48.0 и 35.2% связывают санкции с нарушением прав человека).

The conclusion we draw here is that the communication policy of the European Union toward the Belarusian community suffered a complete failure, if such a policy had been pursued at all. Another thing we should consider is whether an efficient communicative policy is possible at all during a period when Belarusians, especially those "advanced", tend to prefer the network and decentralized media to other sources of information.

Geopolitical vector: with the naked eye and through the lens of the media

The question whether the geopolitical choice of the Belarusians can be adjusted by external factors comes down to two aspects – the first one is access to alternative information, and the second one is the possibility for Belarusian citizens to see life in Europe with their own eyes. When it comes to media access, the independent communities of Belarus tend to believe that the widespread anti-European attitudes of Belarusians stem from the effective brainwashing of the population by the state propaganda machine.

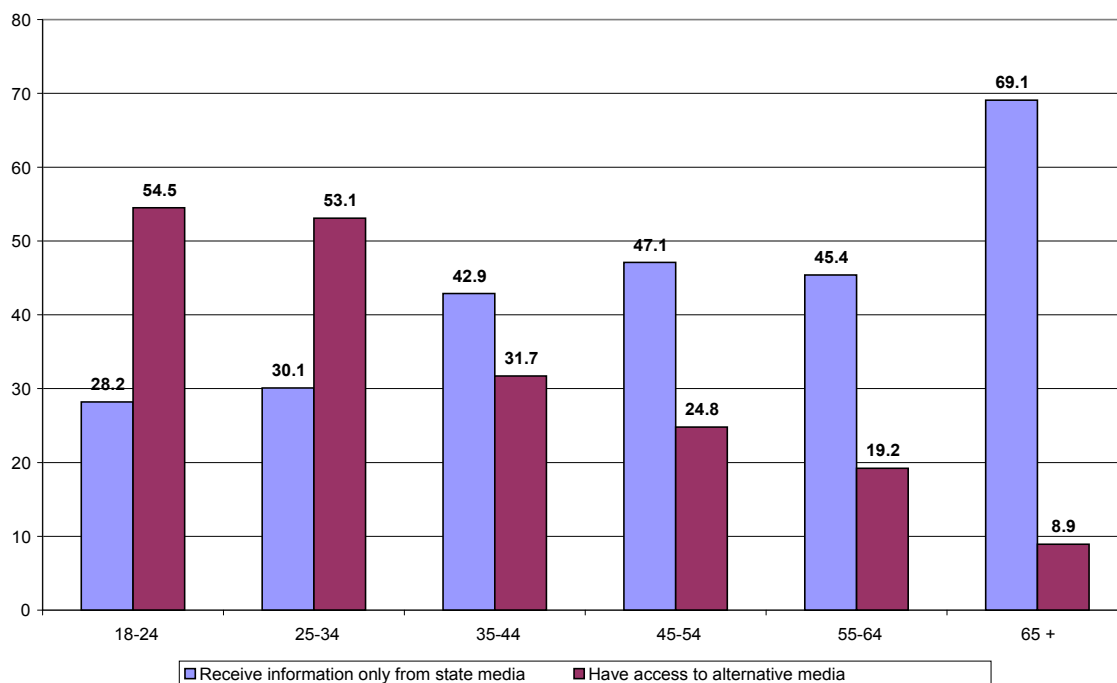
Which sources do you use to receive information about the EU?



The state media are predictably the main source of information about the life and key developments in the European Union for Belarusians. Of all respondents, 86.1% receive information from state television, 46.1% from state newspapers, and 24.3% from state radio. The main alternatives are the Internet media, 24.3%, and independent newspapers, 7.9%. "External" electronic media (Radio Liberty, European Radio, Belsat) inform only 1.2% of respondents. Social networks and "public diplomacy channels" – conversations with relatives and friends (41% of respondents admitted they discuss events in the EU with their close ones), as well as personal experience of staying in the EU (5.6%) – should form a separate category.

We discovered marked differences in the information consumption patterns by various groups of Belarusian society. On the whole, 44.2% of respondents have NO OTHER sources of information about the EU apart from the state media, and 23.8% said their only source of such information was social networks. Media alternatives (the Internet, independent press, "voices") are available only to 32% of the respondents. Even in Minsk, the state media are the exclusive source of information for 49.8% of respondents, and only 41% have access to alternative media (in the countryside, the figures stand at 49% and 19%, respectively). Small towns appear to be most successful in breaking through the media blockade (only 20.8% of the respondents have access only to state media, whereas 44.2% enjoy reports from alternative media). The state media are the only information option for 20% of young people aged under 24 and for 69.5% of pensioners (aged 65 and more). Media alternatives are available to 54.5% of the respondents aged under 24 and 53% of the respondents between 25 and 34 years of age, and it goes steadily downhill from here (31.8% of those aged between 35 and 44 have access to alternatives).

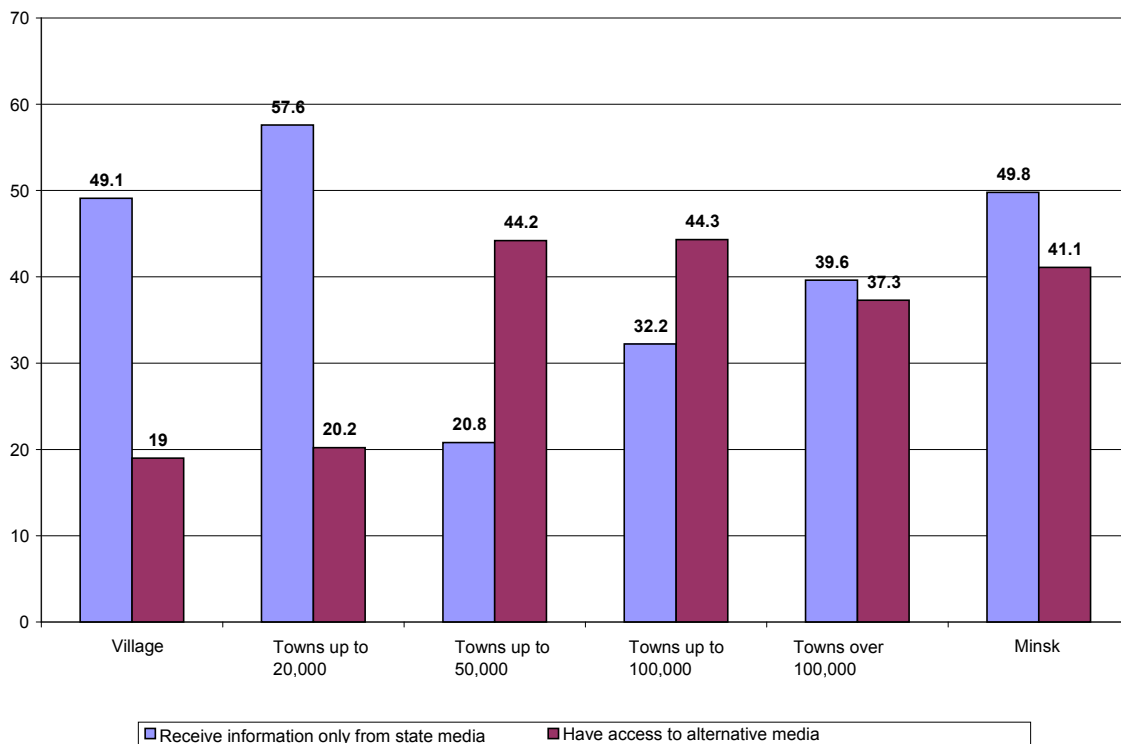
Sources of information about the EU depending on age



Note that the place of residence somehow loses its significance as a factor determining the accessibility of alternative information. Villages and smaller urban settlements indeed remain beyond the access area, whereas small- and medium-sized towns have chances of receiving alternative information comparable to those Minsk residents have. Also noteworthy is the huge number of respondents in Minsk who said they had no alternative sources of information or access to social networks – the figure is almost at a level reported in the countryside, which is ample food for thought about the nature of "urban" life in the Belarusian capital city.

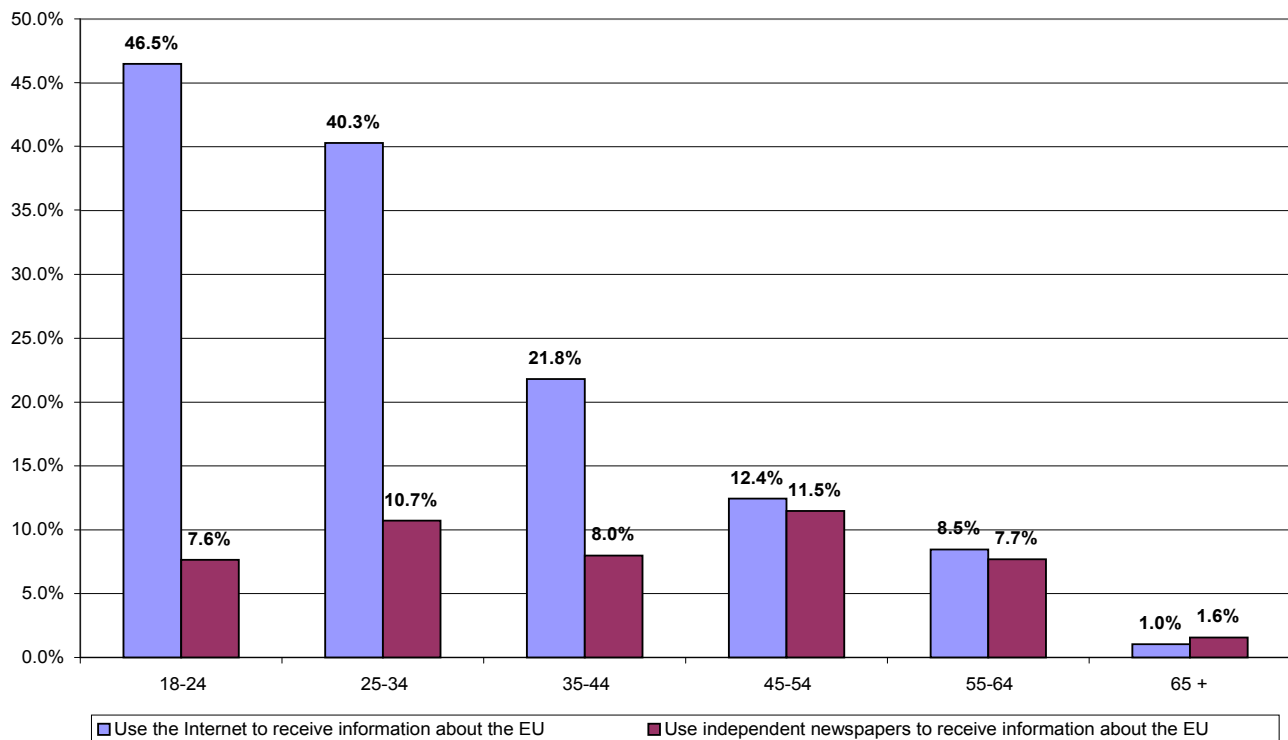
On the alternative media, **we should note the minimum role of the “external” media (radio stations and Belsat television channel) as factors shaping the public opinion about the European Union** (although those media must be excused, as they act as Internet players). One more important thing is that **not a single respondent mentioned NGOs’ media campaigns as sources of knowledge about the EU**. When it comes to privately-owned newspapers and the Internet, these media have markedly different audiences – the Internet already dominates as a media alternative among the youth and its use steadily goes down proportionally to the age of respondents, whereas independent newspapers have almost the same share of readers in all the groups, save for the respondents aged over 65. Therefore, the audience of independent newspapers is slightly more conservative, which does not mean they are any less efficient in their influence on collective consciousness. Noteworthy is the fact that the Internet outstrips the media (except for newspapers) as the dominating media alternative in all age groups, and there is every reason to believe that this trend will continue and deepen.

Access to alternative sources of information depending on location



The general audience of the state media reflects the “mainstream” of Belarusians’ geopolitical orientation, albeit the media are not really solely responsible for shaping these preferences. Among those who learn about the events in the EU mostly from state television and the press, the share of those voting for and against EU accession at a hypothetical referendum is almost identical to the average for the sample – 35% versus 35.8% and 36.2% versus 32.7%, respectively, compared to the average for the country of 37% versus 33%). However, the exclusive audience of the state media is by all means more conservative than the average for the country: only 26.9% of those with access to state media only would vote for EU accession, compared to 67.3% of those who make use of alternative sources of information. Information consumption patterns are definitely a function of respondents’ social dynamism.

Use of alternative sources of information about the EU depending on age

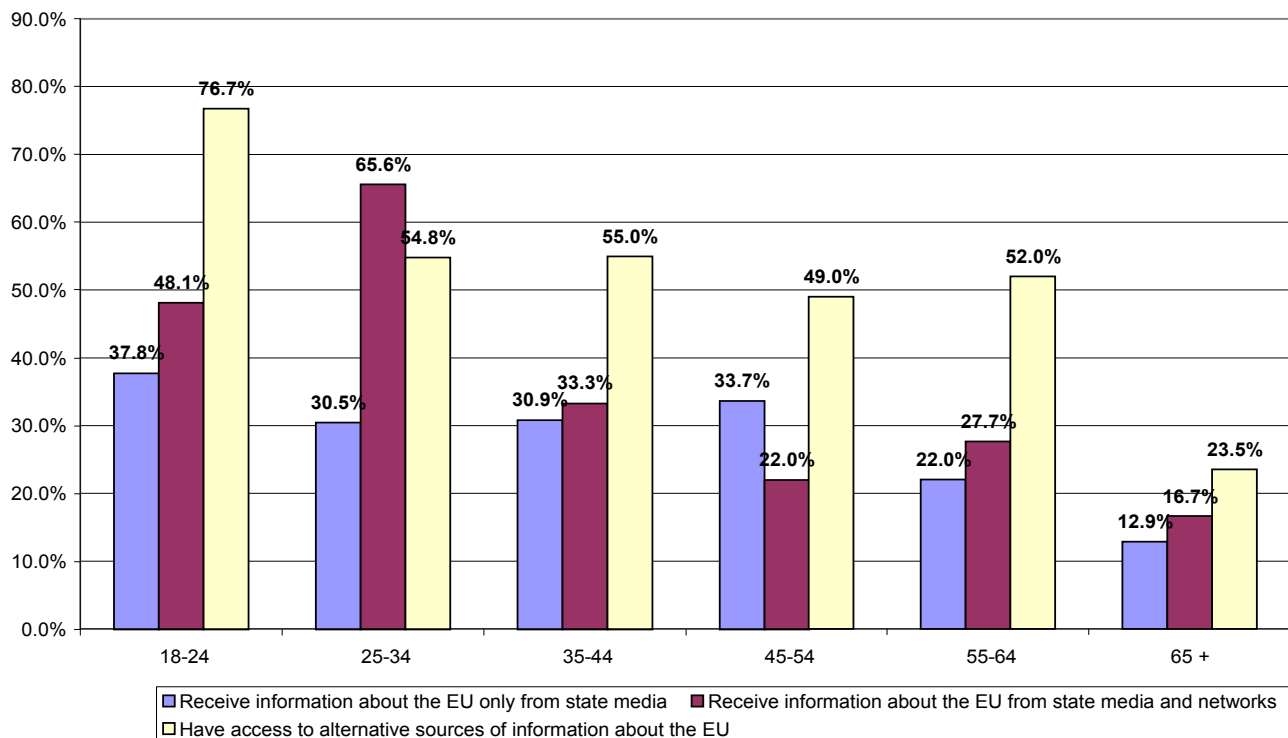


We cannot say the media produce no effect on the audience, though. It is important to be able to highlight key points: the essential thing is not that a respondent watches Belarusian Television, but how the information presented by the official media is balanced by alternative sources. Media effects gauged in this way are more evident in the choice of geopolitical alternatives, which, as we mentioned above, is defined by the social dynamism of respondents.

In each of the three groups formed depending on the information consumption patterns (state media, state media and social networks, and access to alternatives), the support for Belarus' hypothetical EU accession increases in inverse proportion to the age of respondents. However, the level of support in each age group rises by 20% to 30% as soon as access to the alternative media is provided. Among young people aged under 24, only 37.7% of those having no access to alternative media would vote for EU accession, which compares to a 76.7% share of accession supporters among those with access to alternatives. The figures stand at 30.9% and 66% in the group of those aged up to 44, and 12.9% and 23.6% in the group of pensioners aged over 65.

Indicative is a very strong transformation potential of access to the alternative media on the youngest Belarusians – a young person with no access to the Internet is no different from an average Belarusian.

Support for accession to the EU depending on access to media alternatives,
in age groups

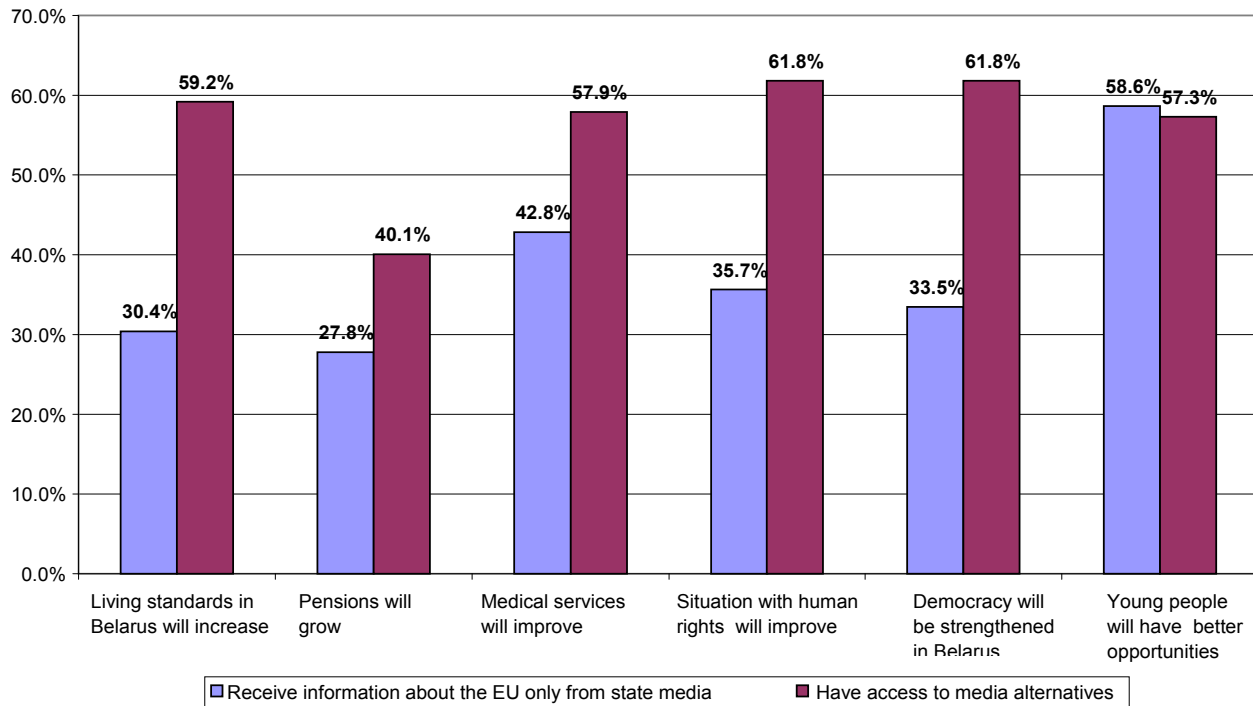


As a matter of fact, the respondents that have access to information alternatives and those receiving information exclusively from the state media differ fundamentally only in their expectations of improvements in living standards as a result of a hypothetical EU accession. Only 30.6% of those having access to state media only expect improvements, compared to 59.2% in the group of those enjoying access to alternative media. However, the gap gets narrower when it comes to improvements in the situation with pensions (27.8% and 40.1%, respectively), or healthcare quality (42.9% and 57.9%). At the same time, those with access to media alternatives and without it show a striking solidarity in assessing the possible negative consequences of joining the EU: increases in prices are expected by 71.9% of the respondents without access to alternative media and 69.5% of those having alternative information; rises in utility fees are anticipated by 68.9% and 64.2% respectively; and an increase in the unemployment rate, by 56.3% and 38.8% (here we once again observe a broader gap).

Therefore, one should be very cautious about claims that the state media brainwash the population with anti-European propaganda. On the one hand, the state media together with official propaganda also provide objective information about life in the EU, especially when they address actual economic and social problems. The independent media, too, raise these problems, so there is no effect of "reverse brainwashing" of Euro-enthusiasts. Expecting mutual advantages, Belarusian Euro-enthusiasts are well aware that they will have to lose somewhere.

**Assessment of the potential positive consequences of Belarus' hypothetical accession to the EU.
depending on access to information alternatives**

Question: "Supposing Belarus has become a member of the EU. What is the likelihood that as a result of this ..."

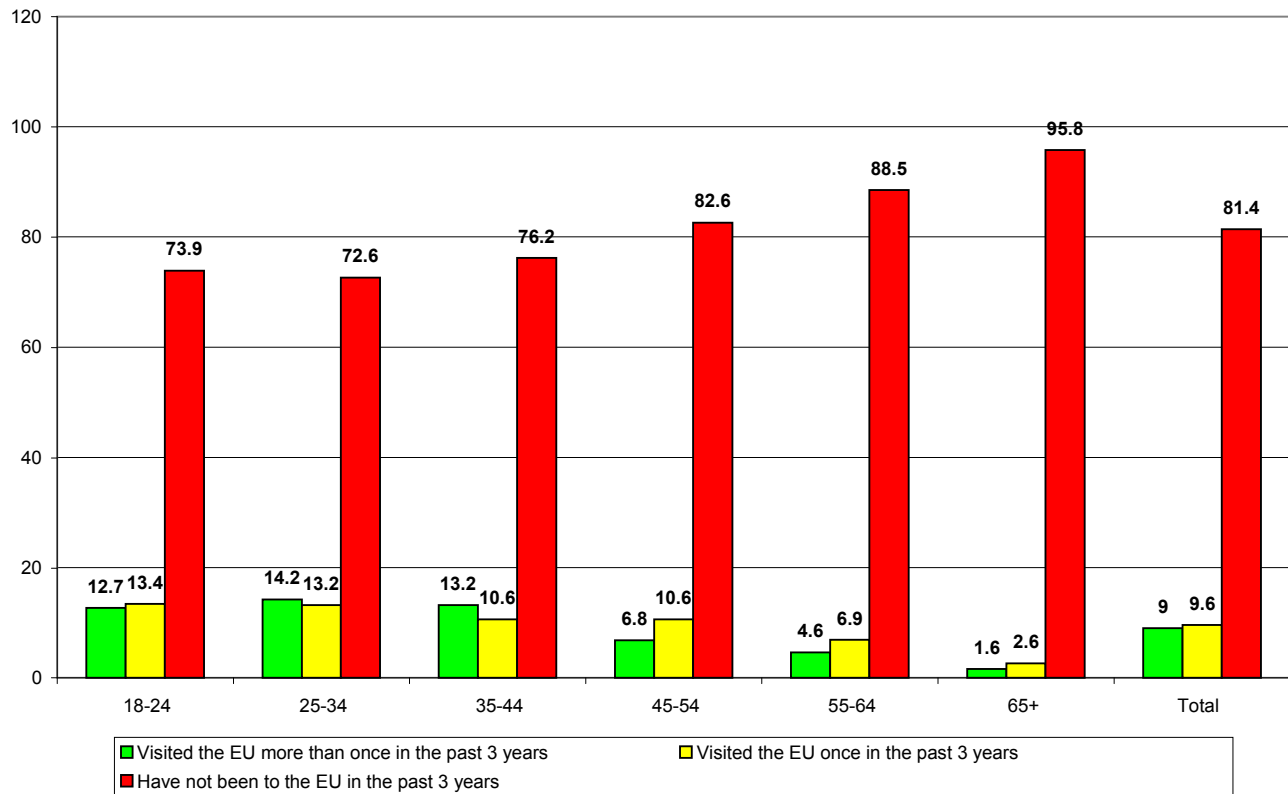


We therefore recommend caution in assessing the influence of state media on the geopolitical choice of Belarusians. The peculiarity of the state propaganda is that alongside strongly bi-ased judgments it presents quite objective facts about the difficulties of living in the European Union, which can easily be found in alternative sources. To maintain that the state media "are always lying" or "brainwashing" is to create preconditions for being accused of partiality.

European choice: do visas matter?

Is there interdependence between free travel to the European Union and geopolitical choice? This question is especially important for the Belarusian NGOs that campaign for easier visa formalities with Europe. Such campaigns are often thwarted by the misunderstanding of European officials and parliamentarians, who claim cheaper and easier visas for Belarusians would encourage the Lukashenko regime. Interpreted differently, opponents of cheaper visas insist that they will not make life for Belarusians more comfortable amid the dictatorship. The same sort of rhetoric is often heard from some opposition politicians – they speak out against cheaper and easier visas for those who tolerate political reprisals in their own country. **Our findings clearly show that lower barriers to free travel to the European Union lead to an increase in pro-European attitudes in Belarus without fail, hence an expansion in the social base of those who support changes.**

Frequency of visits to the EU depending on age



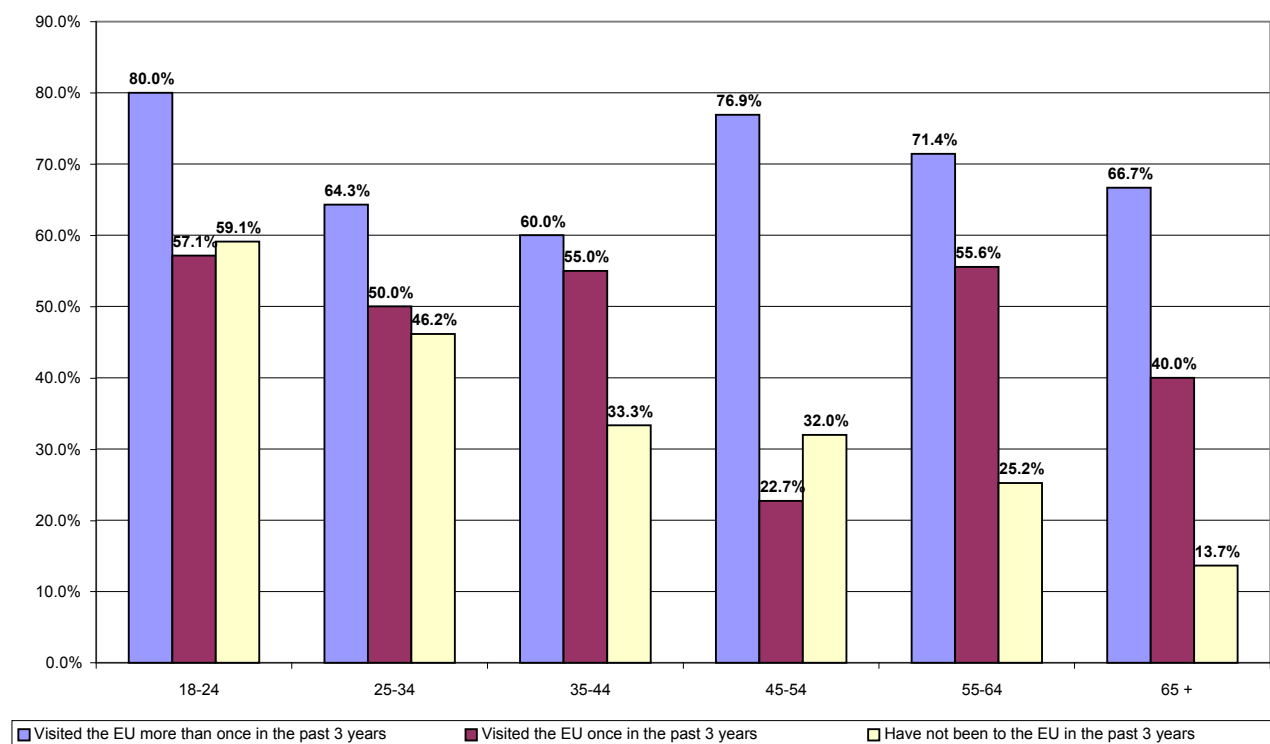
Notably, 9% and 9.6% of Belarusian voters visited the EU “more than once” and “once”, respectively. In the group of young people under 24 years of age, 73.9% have never been to Europe, almost the same as in the middle-aged group (76.2%). The interconnection between the frequency of visits to the EU and the European choice is absolutely clear: 68.4% of those who have visited the EU more than once in the past three years would vote “for” the accession to the Union, which is almost twice as much as the average for the sample; the figures stand at 46.1% in the group of those who visited the EU only once and 33.4% among respondents who have not been to the EU, which is a bit lower than the mean for the sample.

Since foreign trips represent only one of the social dynamism factors, the transformational significance of personal communications in the EU (just as the liberalization of the visa regime) may be challenged: most of the visits to the EU have been in the group of young respondents, most of whom are already “in favor”. We monitored the degree of support for integration with the EU in various age groups depending on the level of education (see the table below) and discovered that frequent visits to the EU lead to an increase in support for the European integration in all age groups by at least several dozen percentage points.

The reserve for increasing support for Belarus’ orientation toward the EU lies primarily in reducing the “visa barriers” between the Union and Belarus. It ought to be noted that this resource will be efficient for the most part in modifying the consciousness of senior citizens, who are characterized by distinctive conservatism and anti-European attitudes. Anyway, even if the visa regime is liberalized completely, one should not expect miracles: only 38.1% of the respondents said free travel to the EU was “very important” (71.2% among the young, 30.1% among the middle-aged respondents (aged between 45 and 54), and 9.9% among the pensioners aged over 65), whereas 27.5% said it was “not important at all” (7.1% in the group of young people, 27.3% in the middle-aged group and 63.4% in the group of pensioners). One should have no doubts

that should visa formalities get much easier, the number of trips to the EU will increase significantly (roughly as much as it fell after the visa regime got tighter in 2007). Consequently, the potential of “open doors” in modifying the public consciousness remains unbelievably huge even though the Belarusians are “notorious” home-lovers. **Notably, the transformation potential of free travel is most evident in the group of the respondents who have frequently visited the EU, which stresses the importance of an easier access to multiple visas.**

Support for accession to the EU depending on the frequency of visits to the EU, in age groups



CHAPTER 2. BELARUSIANS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE EU: GEOPOLITICAL CHOICE IN ALL OBJECTIVITY

Belarusians differ as to their choice of the “external vector” of their country’s development, although the pro-Russian vector enjoys a slightly stronger support. When choosing between geopolitical alternatives, both the pro-Russian and pro-European parts of Belarusian society are mostly guided by pragmatic economic reasons, namely, to what extent the choice of friends and partners will promote improvements in their well-being. However, educational and cultural factors, as well as information consumption models, play an important role in shaping the assessment of benefits and advantages of this or that development pattern.

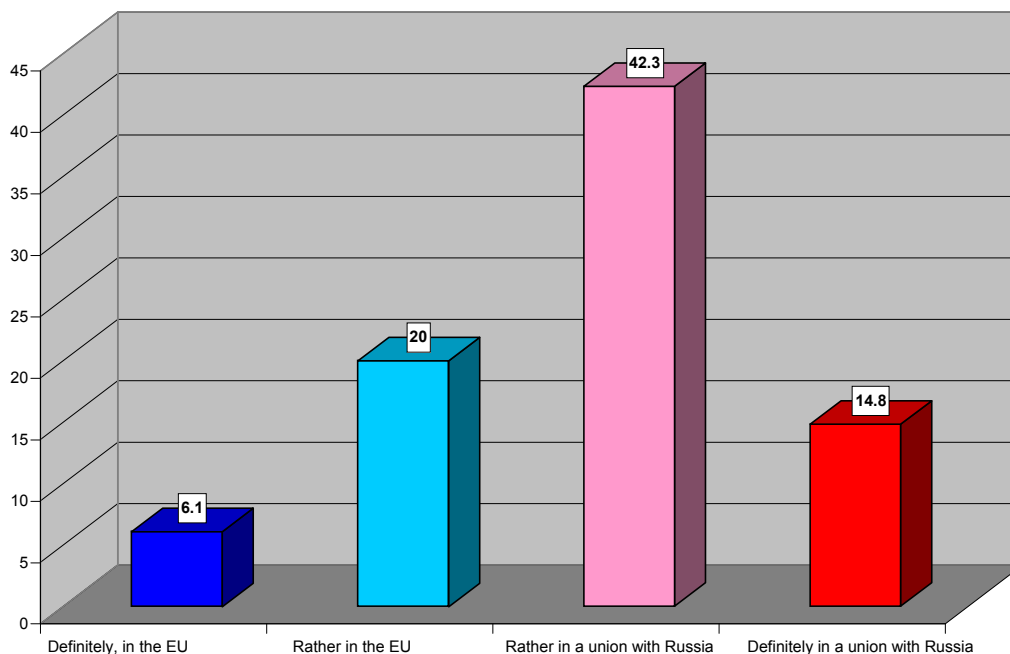
The basic findings of the study “Belarusian and the World” confirm the key parameters of geopolitical preferences of Belarusians identified by researchers representing other independent centers, namely:

- **The bipolarity of the geopolitical orientation of the Belarusian nation with certain prevalence of the pro-Russian vector still remains.** In the meantime, the proportions of those who would vote for or against EU accession at a hypothetical referendum are roughly equal, the share of integration supporters being slightly higher (37% would vote for Belarus’ joining the EU and 33% would vote against it).
- **Economic reasons prevail among the factors determining the choice of geopolitical alternatives** both among pro-Russian and pro-European respondents, even to a greater extent in the latter group. The only non-economic reason that can seriously influence the choice of alternatives – the issue of security – is especially significant for the advocates of an independent Belarus that does not join any alliances. The “value-based” lectures of the supporters of the “path to Europe” (on democracy, security, national independence) fall on what is not really a very fertile soil.
- **Our analysis shows that a part of the pro-Russian respondents are devoid of a stable negative perception of the EU and they may back the “European vector” in certain political and media contexts.** The respondents focused on a “simultaneous” union with Russia and the EU do not consider the two alternatives to be antagonisms that call for a stark choice. **It follows that the presentation of the European choice as an “anti-Russian” choice narrows the social base of the supporters of the “path to Europe”.**

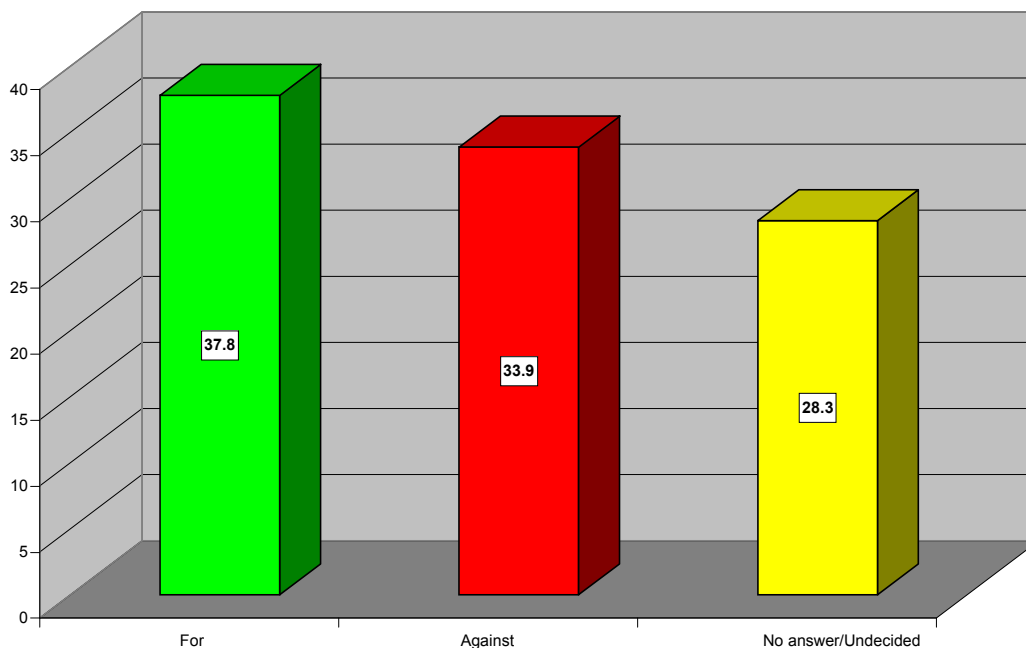
Baseline orientation – a pro-Russian choice with a European flavor?

In the end, in the “stark choice” between the EU and Russia, Belarusian society is inclined toward the pro-Russian option. Before embarking on a discussion about the causes of this gravitation (economic and cultural determination of the choice is analyzed in detail throughout the study) we should note that when answering the question: “In your opinion, in which union the Belarusian people would have a better life?” most respondents made use of the predeterminer “rather” (“rather” in a union with the EU or “rather” in a union with Russia), which attests to the instability of both the pro-Russian and pro-European choices.

In your opinion, in which union the life of Belarusians would be better?



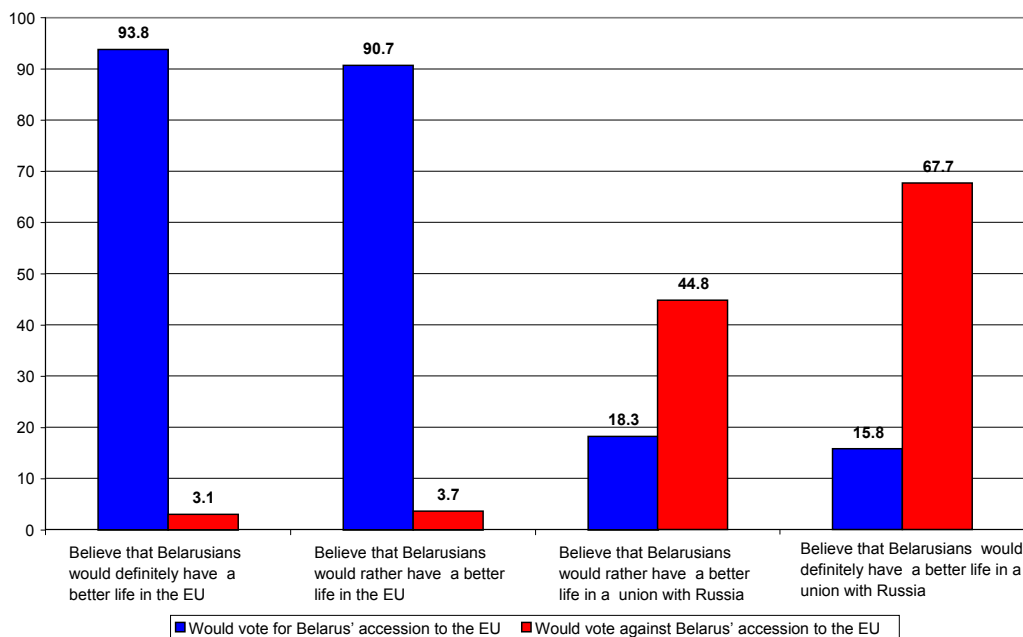
If a referendum were held tomorrow on Belarus' accession to the EU, you would vote...



The correlation of two questions presents an interesting picture: the respondents who believe it would be better for Belarusians to live in a union with the EU (both the "absolutely" and "rather" groups) would vote for Belarus' membership in the EU almost unanimously. However, many of those who believe Belarusians would be happier in a union with Russia, absolutely or rather, admitted they would vote for EU accession; in

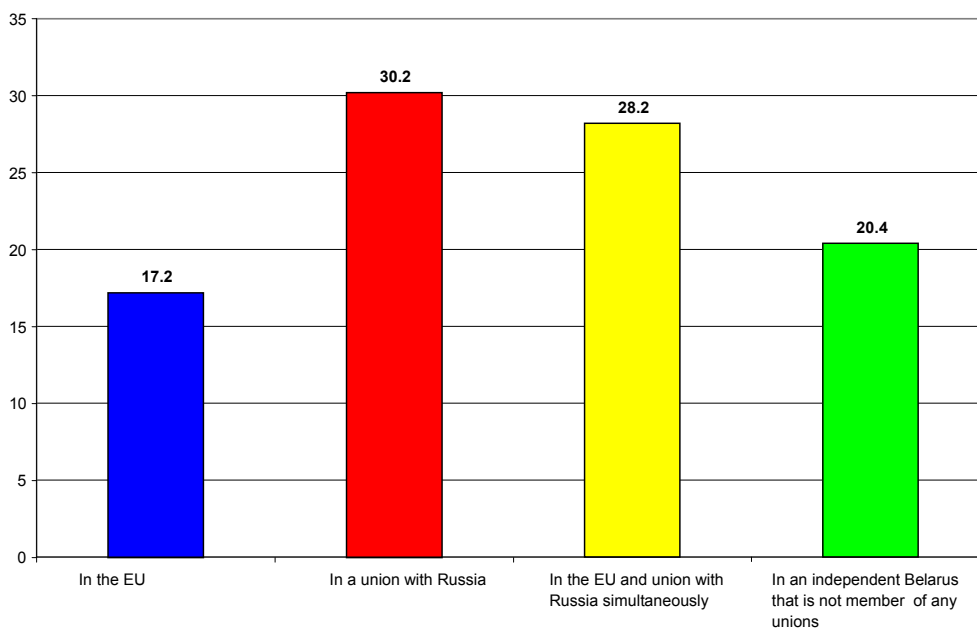
the group believing the country would be happier “rather in a union with Russia” less than half would vote against the integration with the European Union. Therefore, **the dominating part of Belarusian society that is inclined to support a union with Russia is the more susceptible to media manipulation, and its choice may be reversed even with an insignificant propaganda campaign.**

(In)stability of Belarusians' geopolitical choice



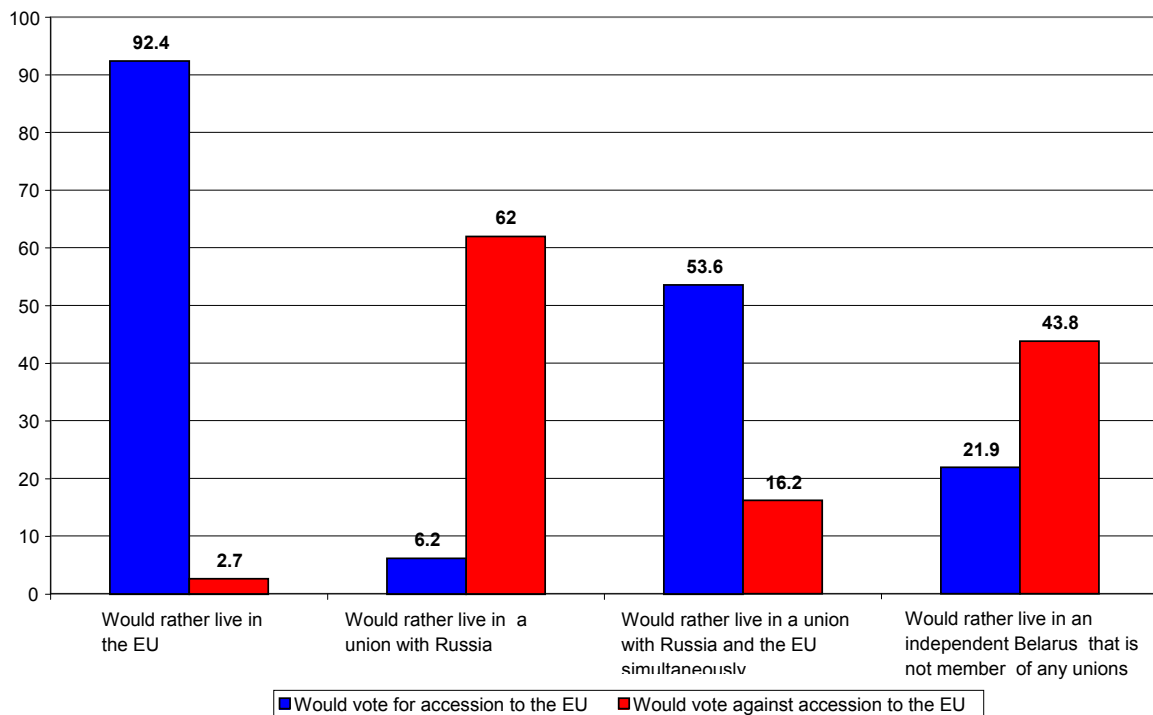
When choosing from the four political alternatives (union with the EU, union with Russia, union with the EU and Russia simultaneously, and an independent Belarus that is not part to any union) Belarusians tend to prefer the Russian option.

Choice of one of the four political alternatives. Question: “You would rather live...”



However, it should be noted that by their socio-cultural type, the proponents of unions with Russia and the EU are closer to those advocating the “net” European choice, whereas the supporters of autarchy look more like those backing a “net” union with Russia. One proof is that most of the supporters of a simultaneous union with Russia and the EU would vote for Belarus’ accession to the EU. It appears that the “liberal” (union with the EU together with Russia or without it) and “Lukashenko-ist” (union with Russia or no union at all) options are almost equal.

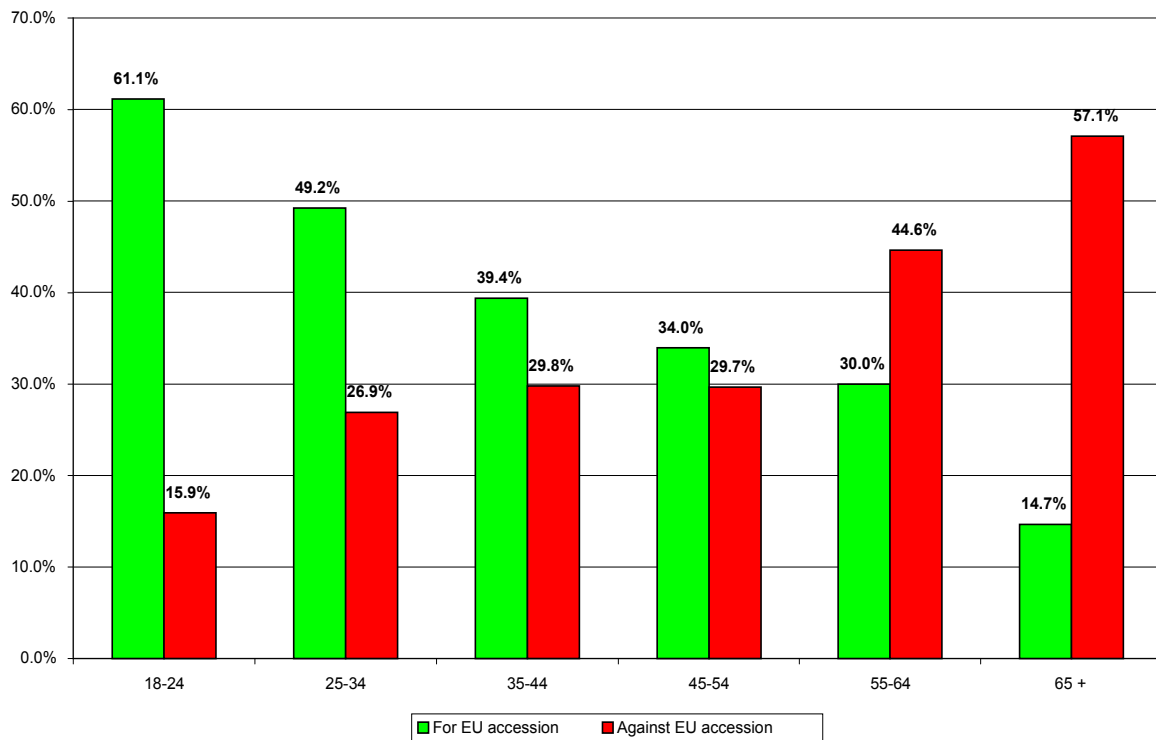
Votes “for” membership in the EU depending on geopolitical choice



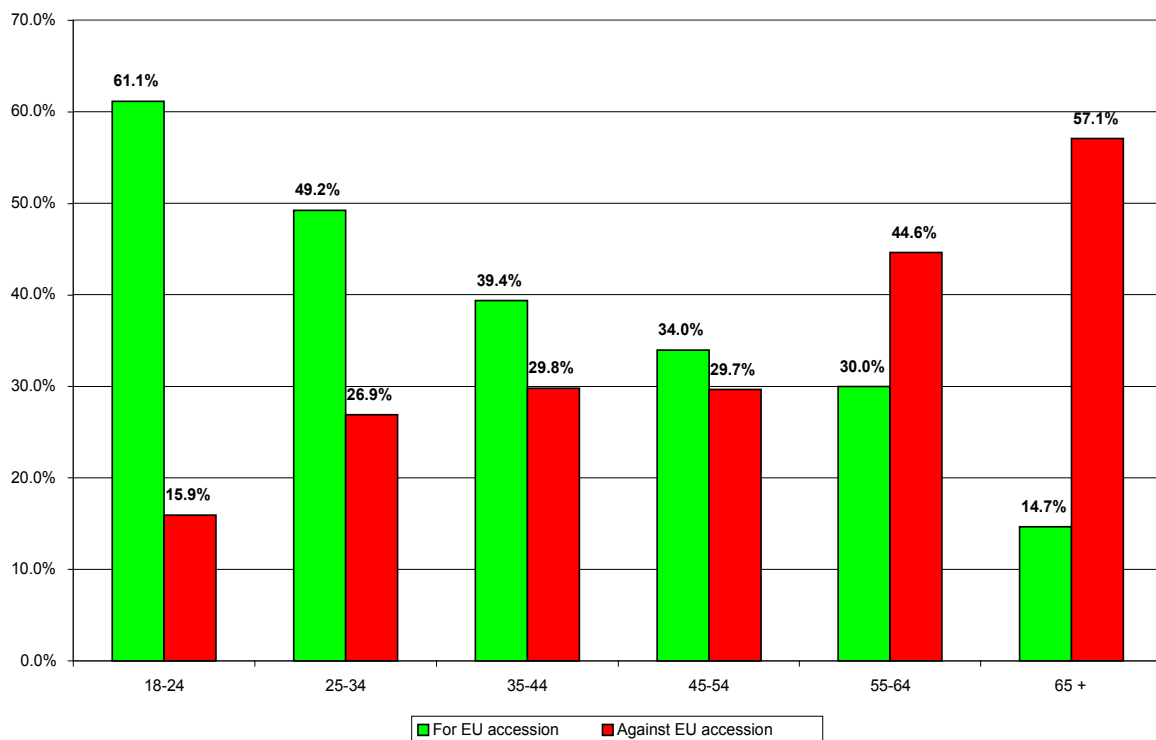
Geopolitical choice is determined by the social dynamism of the respondent

Predictably, most of the Belarusian Euro-enthusiasts are found in the group of young people (61.1% of the respondents aged under 24 would vote for Belarus’ joining the EU, which compares to 14.7% in the group of the respondents aged over 65). The median age – the group of people between 35 and 44 years of age – is the ridge where the “pro-European” dominant transforms into the pro-Russian choice (in other words, the older the respondents, the stronger the pro-Russian attitude and the weaker pro-European moods). The relations of the remaining social and professional groups almost repeat the trend of the “solid” pro-Russian orientation in the “backward” groups and certain domination of pro-European attitudes in the “advanced” groups. A bit more than half of the respondents with higher education (52.3%) would vote “for” EU accession (with only 26.1% against it), whereas in the group of people with primary education, the figures stand at 8.3% and 63.9%, respectively).

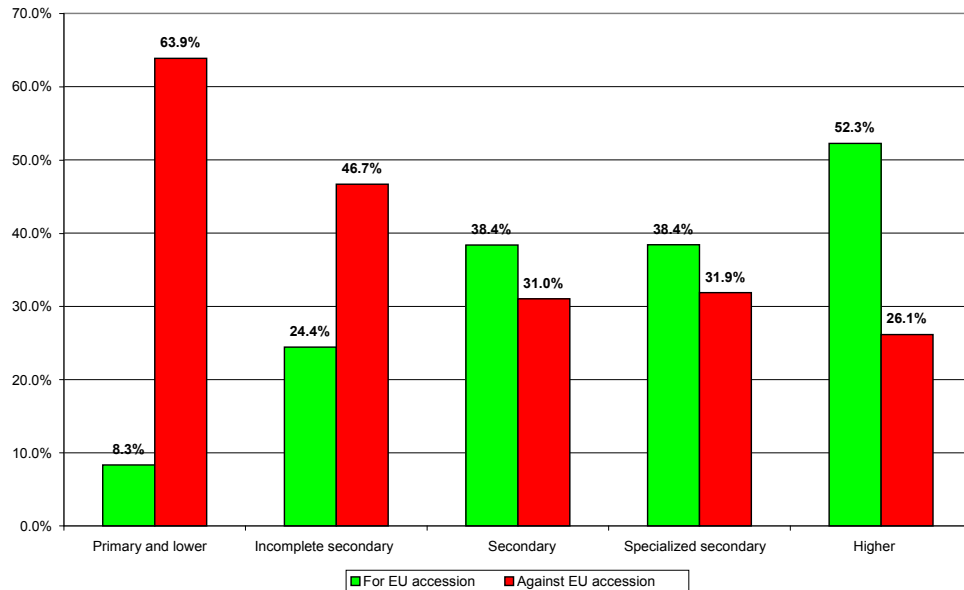
Support for EU accession depending on age



Support for EU accession depending on age

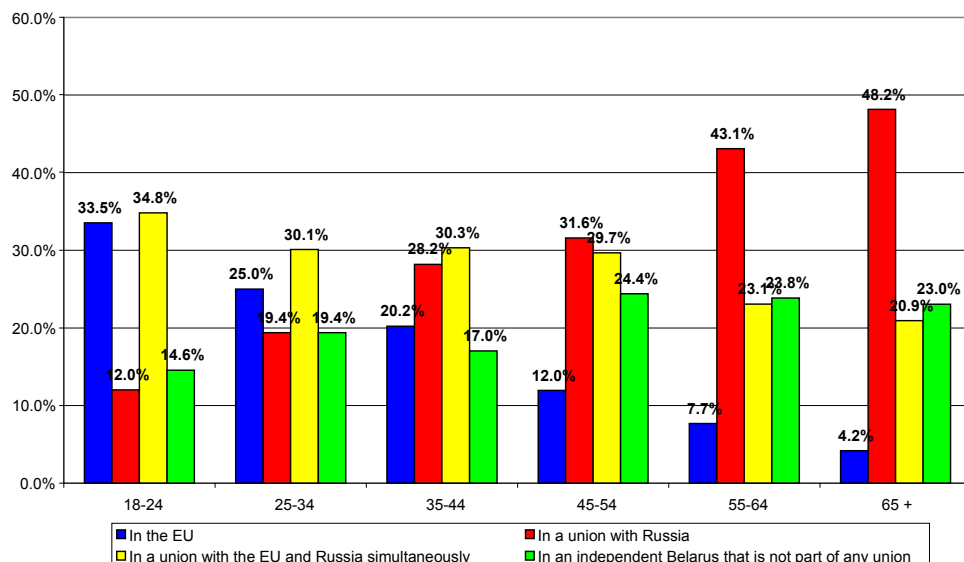


Support for EU accession depending on education

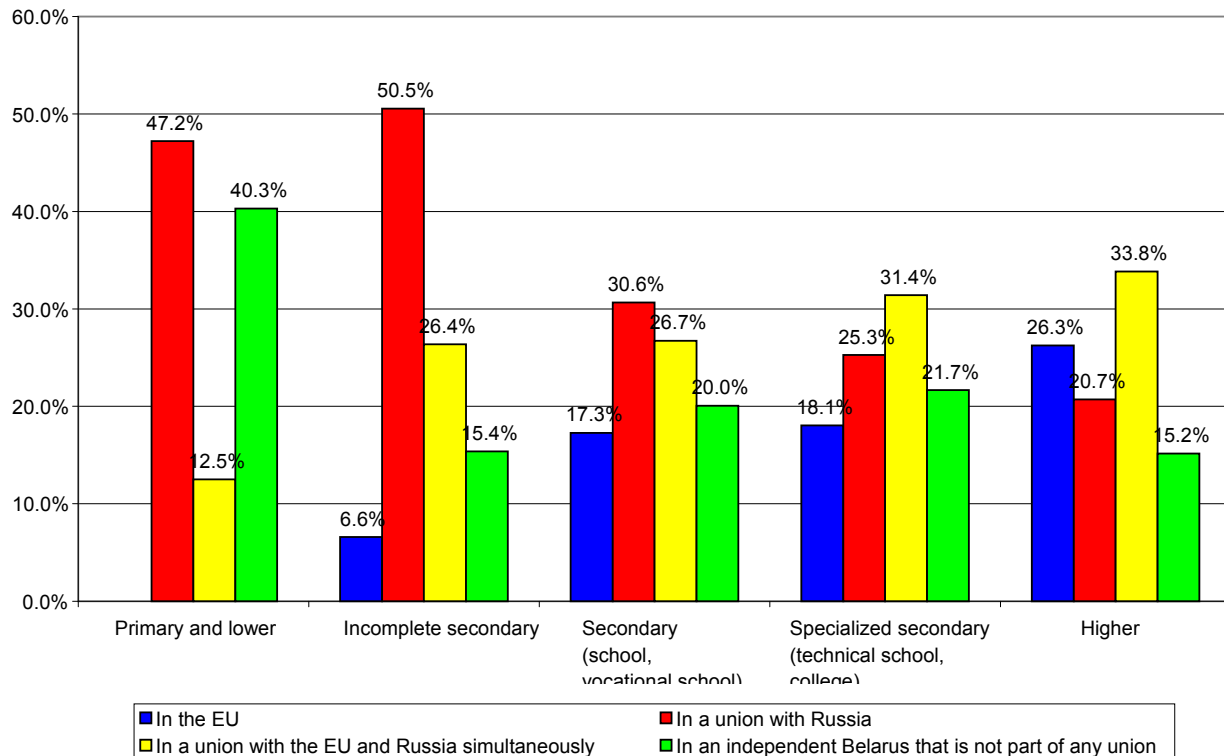


In the group of people with higher education, liberal alternatives – a simultaneous union with the EU and Russia and union with the EU with 33.8% and 26.3%, respectively, prevail, when they are asked to pick one of the four alternatives (union with the EU, union with Russia, union with the EU and Russia simultaneously, and no union at all). At the same time, the “Lukashenko option” dominates among the respondents with primary education – 47% would prefer living in a union with Russia and 40% would like to see Belarus as an autarchy that is not member of any integration body. A similar trend is observed in the age groups: answering the same question, the young split in two equal groups – those willing to live in a union with the EU (34.5%) and in a union with the EU and Russia at the same time (34.8%). The respondents older than 65 years of age show one dominating answer – a union with Russia would be preferred by 48%.

Geopolitical choice depending on age (question: “You would rather live...”)



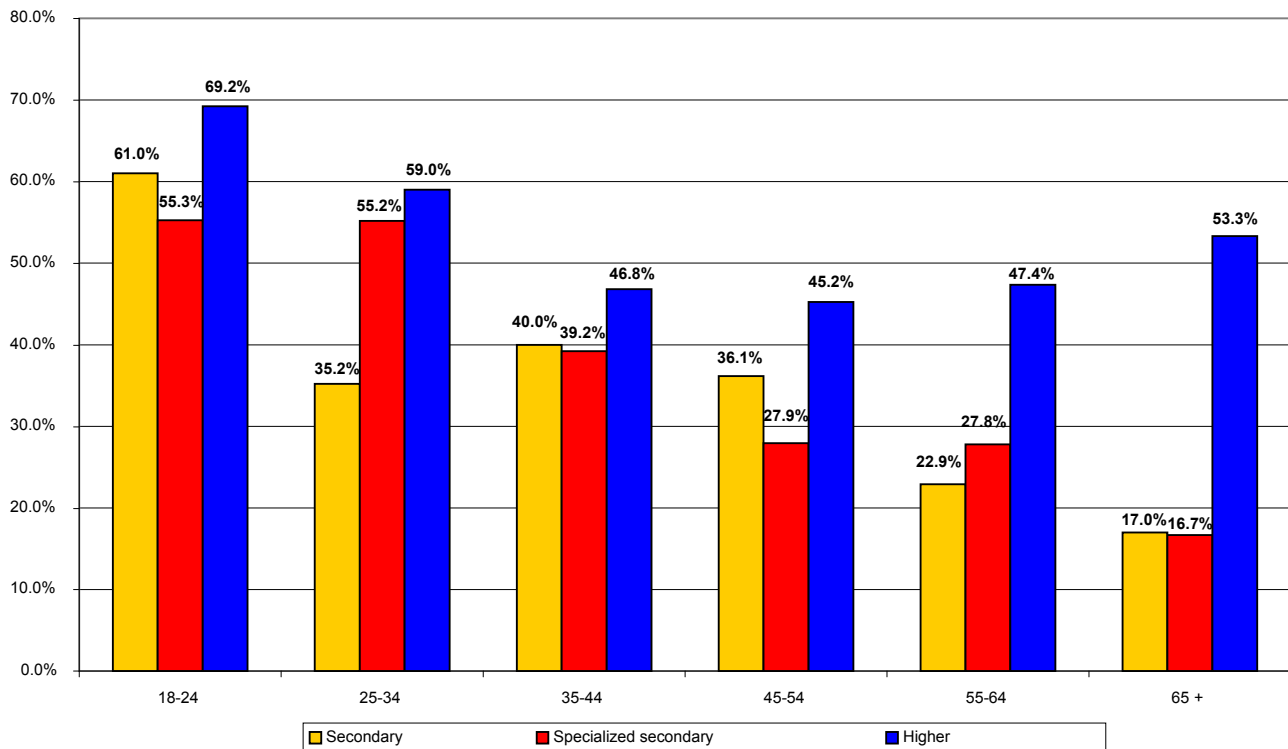
Geopolitical choice depending on education



Since education and age are the two factors determining social dynamics, it would be interesting to look into their interconnection. After monitoring the two variables, we have come to the conclusion that the support for a hypothetical integration with the EU grows weaker as the respondents with primary and secondary education get older (in other words, the older they get, the lower the level of support for European integration). Those with higher education show a different trend: the decrease in their support for Euro-integration stabilizes at the middle-age point and then swings to a slight growth, which suggests that education as an additional factor of social dynamism neutralizes the age-dependent growth in conservative moods that is typical of Belarusian society.

"The clash of civilizations" in the matter of geopolitical choice has been losing its weight. There are just a bit more supporters of European integration among Belarusian Catholics (43.9% would vote for accession to the European Union) than among Orthodox believers. Asked to choose one of the four geopolitical alternatives, Catholics are less inclined to seek a union with Russia (11% as compared to 32.2% in the Orthodox group); at the same time, the group of Catholics includes markedly more opponents of any unions than the average for the sample (36.6% against 18.8% in the group of Orthodox believers and the average for all respondents of 20.4%). Given that the "pro-Russian" and "autarchic" voters are clearly the electorate of the authorities, one can be certain that for Belarusian Catholics who support the current authorities "non-alignment" replaces the pro-Russian choice, which can be regarded as the mainstream option for Orthodox supporters of the authorities.

Support for EU accession depending on education, in age groups



There is hardly any significant interrelation between the geopolitical choice and the gender of respondents. During the hypothetical referendum on accession to the European Union, 39.8% of males and 36.1% of females would vote "for". The difference of 3.7 percentage points could be regarded as a statistical error, the more so because women more often reach old age than men, and it is during that phase of life that anti-European attitudes dominate. The difference in answers to other questions gauging the geopolitical choice of the Belarusian are also well within the range of statistical error.

The support for president Lukashenko is more evident in the groups supporting Russia and "non-aligned" status of Belarus and is minimal in the pro-European and "multipolar" groups. The recently popular speculations that the Belarusian president has managed to win over new groups of citizens by "straddling" the European vector do not hold true.

Geopolitical choice is made objectively: Belarusians do not expect "manna from heaven"

The slogan "Belarus to Europe" became popular during the period of youth street rallies in the mid-1990s, whereas the objective of promoting Belarus' accession to the European Union made its way into the programs of some opposition political parties as late as the turn of the century. When advertising this goal, some of the opposition activists sought to "straddle" an idea that, firstly, Lukashenko would never be able to steal from them (as it happened to independence) and, secondly, that would spare the parties campaigning on the European platform the need to elaborate and justify their objectives and programs. One would think it was clear as day – Europe is the ocean of stability and prosperity, indeed, we will have to work hard to get there, but once we turn the corner, it will be safe and easy for children and grandchildren. Asked whether they would support Belarus' accession to the EU, up to 60% of the respondents used to answer in the af-

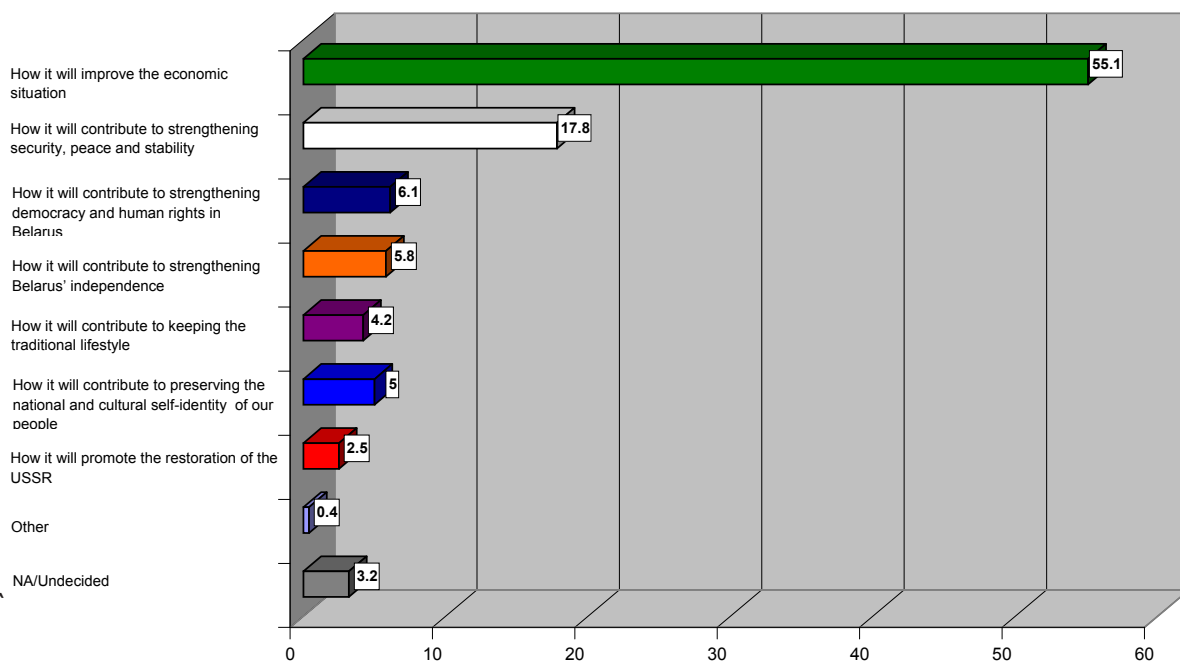
firmative then.

The residue of such stereotypes still remains in the consciousness of some opposition politicians, despite the fact that the appeal of the European Union in the public consciousness has faded: the number of Euro-enthusiasts has almost halved (the decrease started from the moment Central European countries joined the Union). The reality and fairy-tale were not the same anymore, the gap was widening, and the reality turned into a nightmare judging by the reports of the official media, whereas the inability to climb over the visa barrier convinced Belarusian laymen that “we are not welcome in Europe”.

So should politicians be talking to people about Europe at all, or is it true that, as critics of “pro-European” parties maintain, external policy matters do not interest voters, who have to deal with everyday domestic problems? In fact, our study shows that any foreign political issue is important to a Belarusian voter insofar as it resolves the issues the voter is faced with every day. This phenomenon may be dubbed rationalization of foreign political thinking, which in the Belarusian social consciousness is factored out from the cultural platform and lies almost completely in the realm of the rational choice of an individual. Europe, Russia, etc. are not existential metaphysical goals, but instruments that may come in handy when economic problems need to be tackled. Politicians may like or dislike when voters have a weak reaction to their speeches about values, but they will have to put up with the fact that their efforts will be futile unless translated into the language of objectivity and impartiality.

Why exactly do we make such conclusions? In the recent study “Belarus and the World: Geopolitical Choice and Security in the Context of Economy and Culture”¹ conducted by BISS and NovAK axiometrical research laboratory we looked into the reasons why Belarusians choose either Europe or Russia. The questionnaire included a direct question: what is the main factor determining the choice of Belarus’ allies? The result is evident and unambiguous: the answer “the extent to which it will improve the economic situation” leads by a landslide. The only non-economic dominant is the issues of security, peace and stability. “Ideological” reasons (democracy and human rights, preservation of identity and culture, preservation of the habitual lifestyle, restoration of the USSR, etc.) hardly scored more than 5%-6% of the answers.

What do you think is the main factor determining the choice of Belarus’ allies?

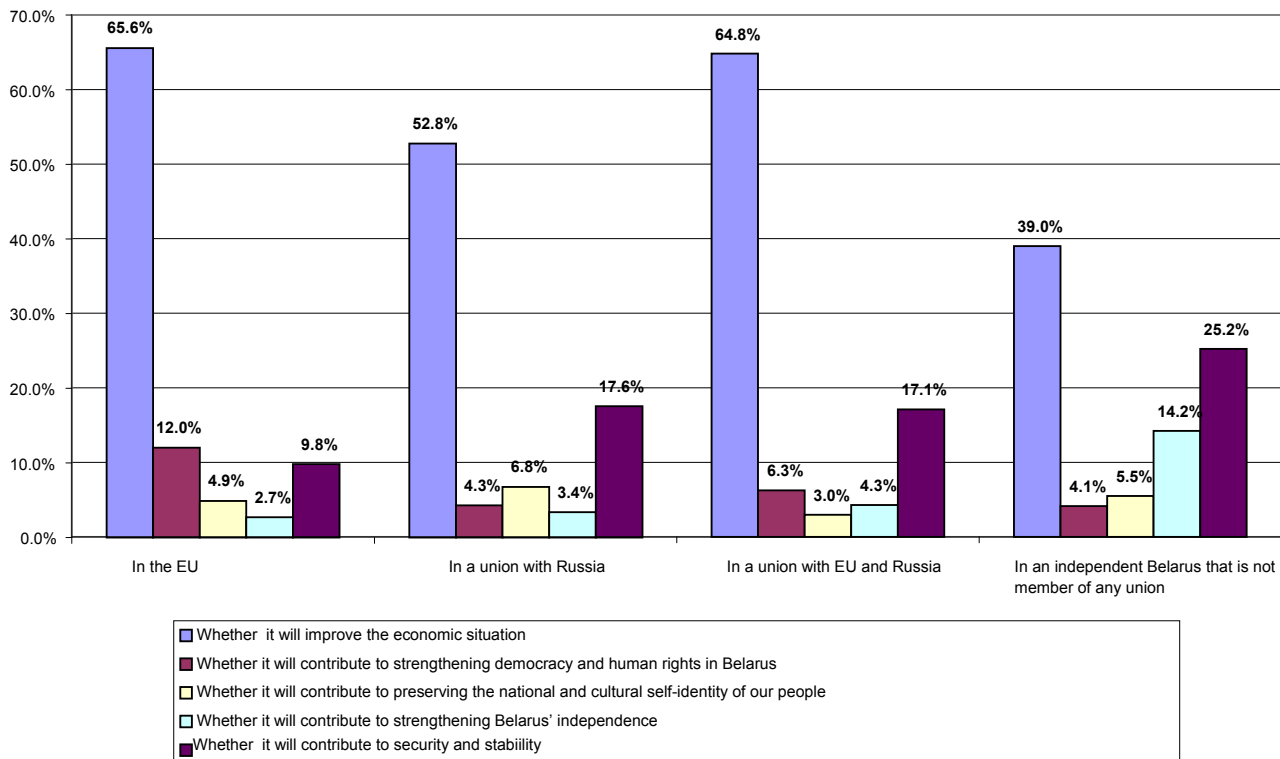


1 The nationwide opinion poll carried out by NovAK is based on a representative sample of 1,071 respondents aged over 18.

The structure of the answers is virtually identical among the advocates of the polar foreign political alternatives; notably, the proportion of those voting with money in mind is the highest in the group of Euro-enthusiasts (proponents of a union with the EU). Only the supporters of “an independent Belarus that is not member of any union” stand out a bit – the security and peace criteria are almost as important for them as economic motives. (The advocates of an autarchy are not nationalists scornful of the “spoilt” Europe, but believers in Lukashenko’s course who are afraid of the “raging sea”, especially Russia, and regard the Belarusian authorities as a protector and benefactor).

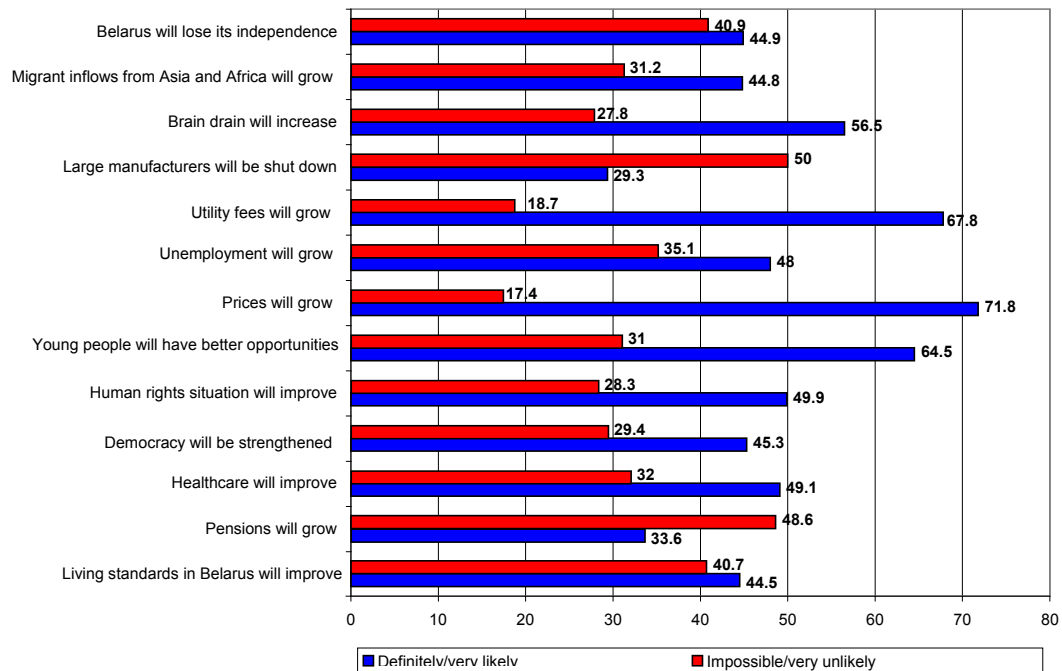
Geopolitical choice determinants among supporters of the four alternatives

Question: “What, in your opinion, is the key criterion for choosing Belarus’ allies?”



However, if economic reasons come first, why are Belarusians afraid of Europe? The answer is simple: in the public consciousness, the EU is far from being the manna coveted by some opposition politicians and publicists. Overall, Belarusian society is capable of adequately assessing the potential consequences of the accession to the EU, or, more properly, the price they will have to pay for a European choice, the “transit cost”, if we use scientific terms. In particular, and most importantly, only slightly less than half of all the respondents expect that the hypothetical accession to the European Union will result in improvements of their financial situation; a bit more anticipate a better quality of social services (such as education), and a lot fewer expect betterments in the life of pensioners, the key electoral block in Belarus. Improvements of the human rights situation and a stronger democracy are expected by less than half of the Belarusians. The strongest positive expectation is that of new prospects for the young, but it is definitely “not for all and not for now”.

Supposing Belarus has become a member of the EU. What is the likelihood that as a result of this...



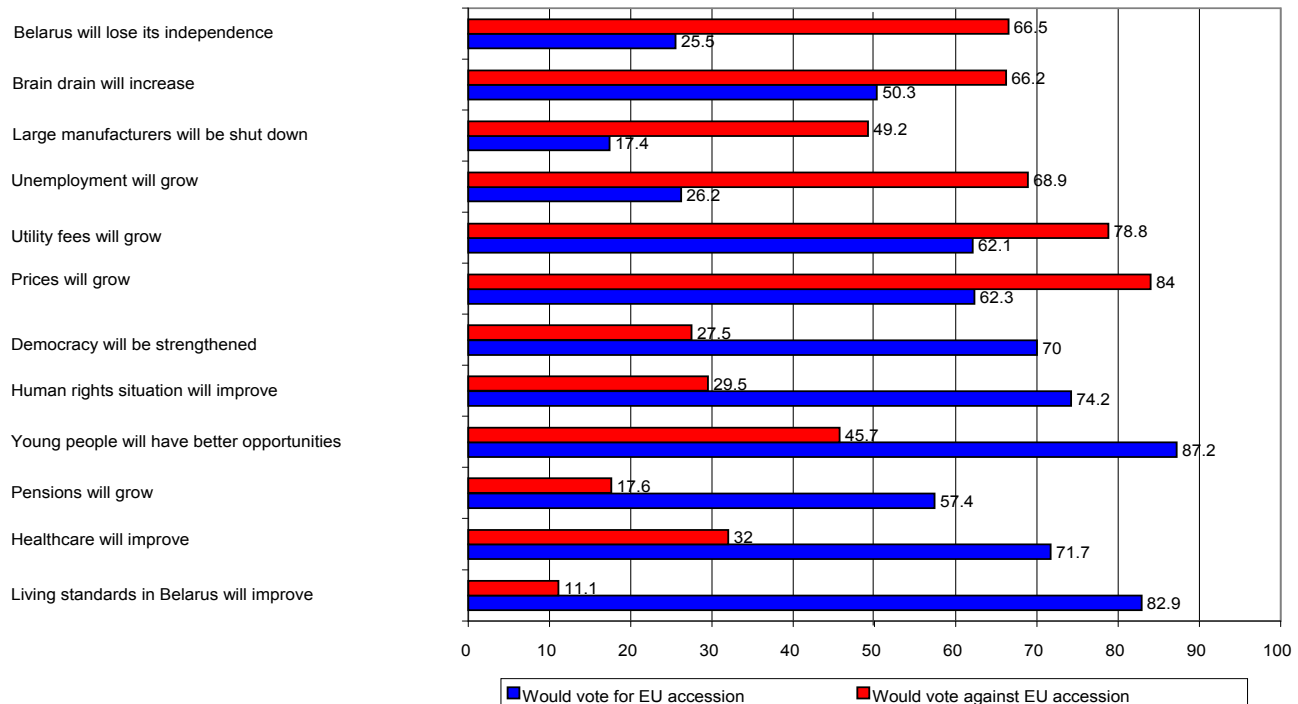
When it comes to negative expectations from the hypothetical union with the EU, the most serious ones are increases in prices, welfare services fees and "brain drain". Expectations of a growth in unemployment are slightly weaker, and, surprisingly, Belarusian society is not willing to agree with the conclusions of the official propaganda that membership in the European Union will result in mass shutdowns of the country's large productions. Taken together, the expectations of the Belarusian public draw quite an adequate picture of the future, especially if we recollect the actual EU integration experience of Belarus' neighbors: they all had to pay first, and then they could use the benefits; the costs were not distributed evenly, as social outsiders and least dynamic population groups suffered the heaviest losses – they were unable to find themselves in the new life, enjoy the benefits of the European integration because of their age, education, or some other factors, and only paid integration costs.

Social dynamism as a factor of geopolitical choice is typical of Belarus, too: over 60% of young people and only 11% of pensioners, over 50% of people with higher education and only 2%-3% with primary education advocate the European choice. Cultural backwardness and propaganda should not be blamed here, as various social groups seem to have a pretty clear idea whether they will be able to adapt to their hypothetical "new life".

Indeed, if we analyze the difference in the assessment of the potential consequences of Belarus' hypothetical accession to the EU between the proponents and opponents of European integration, it will become clear that Euro-optimists and Euro-skeptics are most divided on the anticipated change in living standards (an impressive 83% of the former and only 11.1% of the latter expect improvements). Their assessments of almost all other possible consequences of the integration are also markedly different, except for a few negative ones – the two groups more or less agree when it comes to price and utility tariff increases. Euro-optimists also tend to believe that accession to the EU would result in a massive brain drain, but this seems to appeal to them, as Belarus will be losing their brains.

Supposing Belarus has become a member of the EU. What is the likelihood that as a result of this...

Forecasts of EU accession supporters and opponents, positive answers only



Here lies the interconnection between the social dynamism of a respondent, the way he or she formulates his or her unbiased attitude and the foreign political options he or she selects. Social outsiders are the people whose income primarily depends on social transfers and cross subsidies. If these schemes should be eliminated, their living standard will decrease sharply, or even catastrophically. Social leaders, on the other hand, rely on their wages and salaries, as well as income from their business. Therefore, the nature of their expectations from changes in personal well-being depends on anticipated new possibilities for making money and self-fulfillment: the new opportunities will pay for the increase in gas and electricity bills with handsome interests. This part of Belarusian society, mobile and dynamic, predictably and rationally aims at becoming a part of Europe. At the same time, this layer of Belarusian society is quite narrow for demographic and sociopolitical reasons, whereas the part of society bound by rigid contractual terms with the state is very well aware that in a new political and economic environment their experience and services may be unwanted. To surmount this structural obstacle, Belarus needs to embark on the path of reforms that would lead to a growth of the private sector and share of economically self-sufficient citizens (that is, those who retain social dynamism till the age of 40 and even 50, unlike the majority of the workers of the Soviet-style public sector). It is not really important what these reforms will be and how exactly they will be held – by a democratic government or as a predatory dictatorial privatization.

One general conclusion we can draw here is that the objective choice of Belarusians is formed not so much by the official propaganda, however strong it may be, but as the quite rational evaluation of personal prospects and benefits. This picture of social expectations should be a good lesson to politicians who try to make political hay out of a few attractive slogans. "Belarus to Europe" has lost its sex appeal. Europe is more of a cloying cohabitant who (just like Russia) is wanted for practical reasons rather than passion. This is why, when speaking to the electorate about Europe, you cannot neglect the turn-offs that stop the Belarusians from loving Europe. They include, first of all, the social sphere, pension provision schemes, healthcare and

utilities. If you are capable of convincing voters that cooperation with the EU will help here, then you will have a chance to win over new followers, if not – you will keep wondering why people fail to bite at candies in a blue wrapper with shining stars on them. To believe that one or two showy political slogans will rid them of the need to provide detailed answers to everyday problems is to deliberately play the weak hand, as **the European prospect has so far posed many more questions for Belarusians than it has provided answers.**

In conditions of rationalization of the foreign political choice the dilemma of speaking to voters either about lofty matters or their daily needs is simply non-existent. You will inevitably have to translate lofty matters and noble civilizational goals into the language of unbiased transparent “objectivity”. It is another matter that the rationalization of a geopolitical choice opens an opportunity for a rational dialogue with the public about the geopolitical alternatives.

CHAPTER 3. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY IN PUBLIC OPINION

The final part of the study addresses Belarus' security and the position of the country in military-political blocs. For the first time in the practice of Belarusian social studies, we offer an in-depth analysis of the Belarus-NATO relationship.

Main conclusions:

1. The anti-NATO stereotype perpetuated in Belarusian society is so strong that cooperation with the bloc is only possible beyond the reach of public opinion.
2. The idea of neutrality, popular back in the early 1990s, has lost public support. On the other hand, the popularity of a military and political union with Russia in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has increased.
3. As in the general aspects of geopolitical choice (Russia vs. the EU), the preferences of the majority of respondents are not unambiguous. Some of them would tolerate Belarus' membership in various political blocs or in a single bloc while keeping its neutrality.
4. The uncertainty of a substantial part of respondents in security matters leaves much room for "molding" the public opinion through media policies. The "choice" depends considerably on how a respondent is asked a question.
5. The confusion and inconsistency of the respondents largely indicate that the issues of security are not really in the foreground of public opinion.

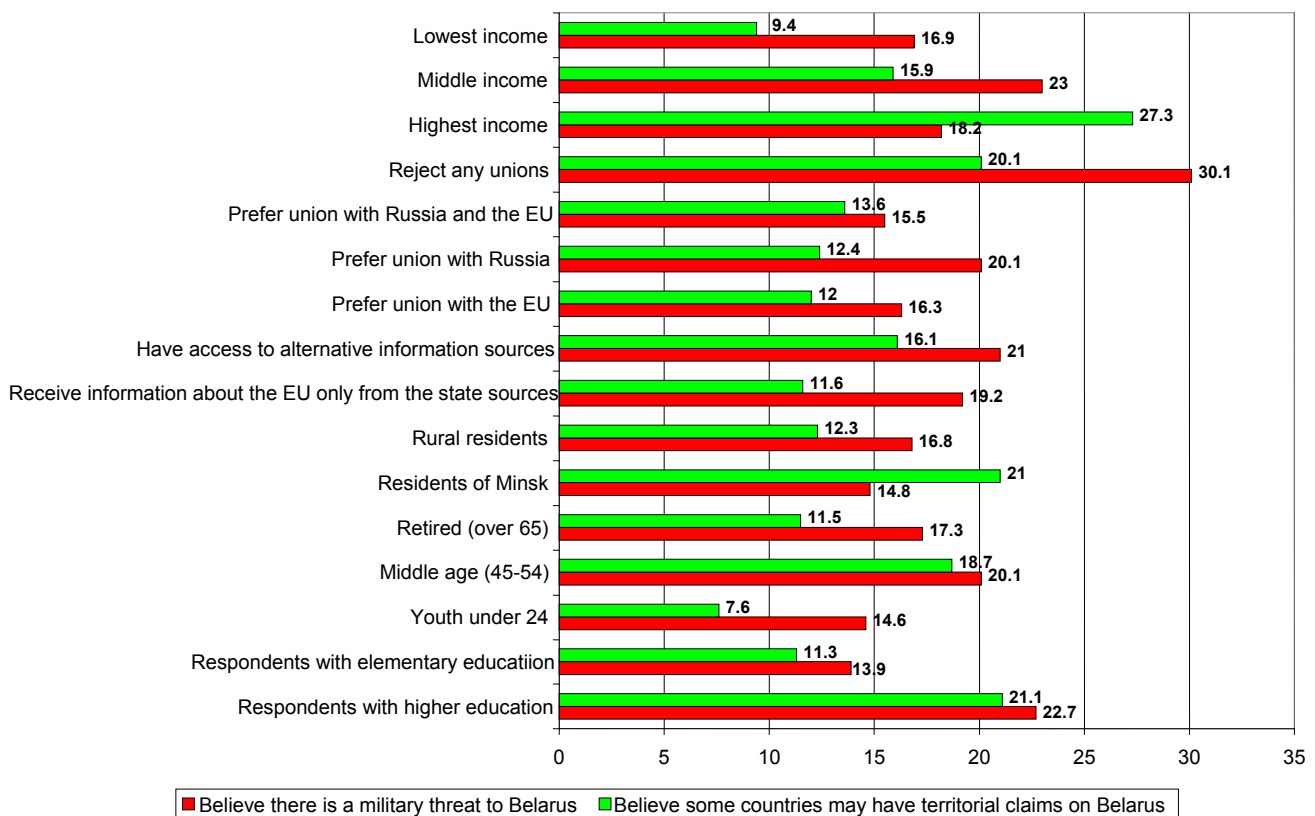
Security threats

An estimated 19.8% of Belarusians believe a military threat from some countries or military blocs is quite real. The feeling of insecurity depends very little on the social dynamism of respondents. In the group of young people aged under 24, 14.6% admit they feel the threat, just a bit fewer than in the group of pensioners over 65 years of age, with 17.3%. Respondents with higher education appear to be concerned over their security even more than the average for the sample – the share stands at 22.7%, which is markedly above the proportions in the groups of people with primary and secondary education, 13.9% and 14.3%, respectively. A military threat is a matter of concern for 14.8% of Minsk residents, which is almost the same as in the countryside (16.8%). Even those informed exclusively by the state media feel insecure almost as frequently as those who have access to alternative sources of information (19.2% and 21.6%). The "alarmists" are therefore psychological rather than social types "spread" over the social structure of Belarusian society. Note that the number of supporters of "an independent Belarus that is not a member of any unions" increases notably in the group of those who sense a military threat (31.7% compared to 17.4% among those who feel no threat). The most frequent sources of potential military threat are NATO with 6%, the United States with 6.6%, and the West as a whole with 1.4%, and Russia with 0.4%.

Of the total number, 13.9% believe other countries have territorial claims to Belarus – they most often mention Poland (6.4%), Russia (2.3%), and Lithuania (1.3%). One per cent of the respondents believe

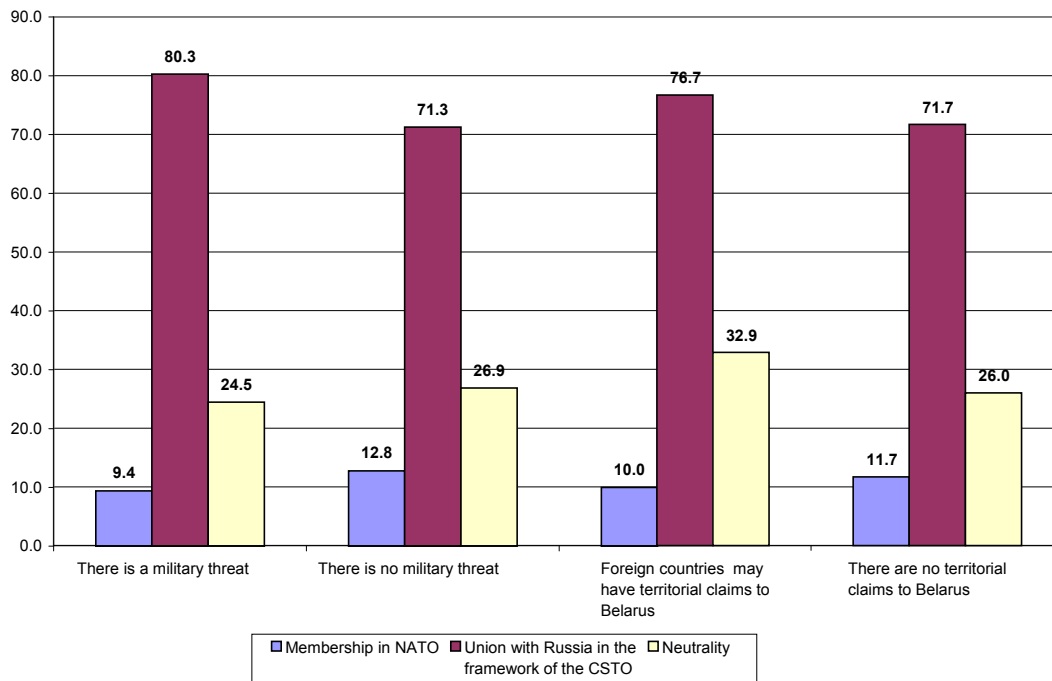
the United States, located in a different hemisphere, may have territorial claims to Belarus. The affirmative answers to the question about territorial claims reach their peak in the middle-aged group: 18.7% of the respondents aged between 45 and 54 trust that Belarusian neighbors have claims on Belarusian lands, which compares to only 7.6% in the group of young people under 24 years of age and 11.5% in the group of pensioners. It is worthy of note that the proportion of those believing other countries may have territorial claims to Belarus is unusually high in the groups of people with higher education and Minsk residents, 21.1% and 21%, respectively. The two groups suspect Poland more than any other country of having territorial claims to Belarus (about 50% of those thinking there are some claims in each group), and about a quarter of those worried about the country's integrity suspect Russia. Those having access to media alternatives believe Belarus is threatened by foreign territorial claims to a greater extent than those subject to monopoly "brainwashing" of the state media (16.1% and 11.6%, respectively). Those believing in the territorial claims of foreign countries prevail in the group of the respondents who have visited the EU in the past three years compared to the group of those who have not been to the EU over the past 36 months (17.7% and 13.3%, respectively). In the group of those wishing to see Belarus as "an independent country that is not member of any unions", the belief in foreign claims on Belarus' territory is stronger than in the groups of advocates of the EU or Russia (20.1%, 12% and 12.4%, respectively). The richest Belarusians tend to believe in foreign territorial claims more than the poorest – 27.3% and 9.4%, respectively.

Feeling of insecurity among various groups



Finally, note that the feeling of external threats has little influence on the choice of security models. Those believing in threats and sensing foreign claims on Belarus' lands a bit more often insist on a military and political union with Russia, however, the discrepancy between the believers and non-believers is within the range of statistical error.

Choice of geopolitical alternatives depending on the sense of threat



Attitude towards NATO

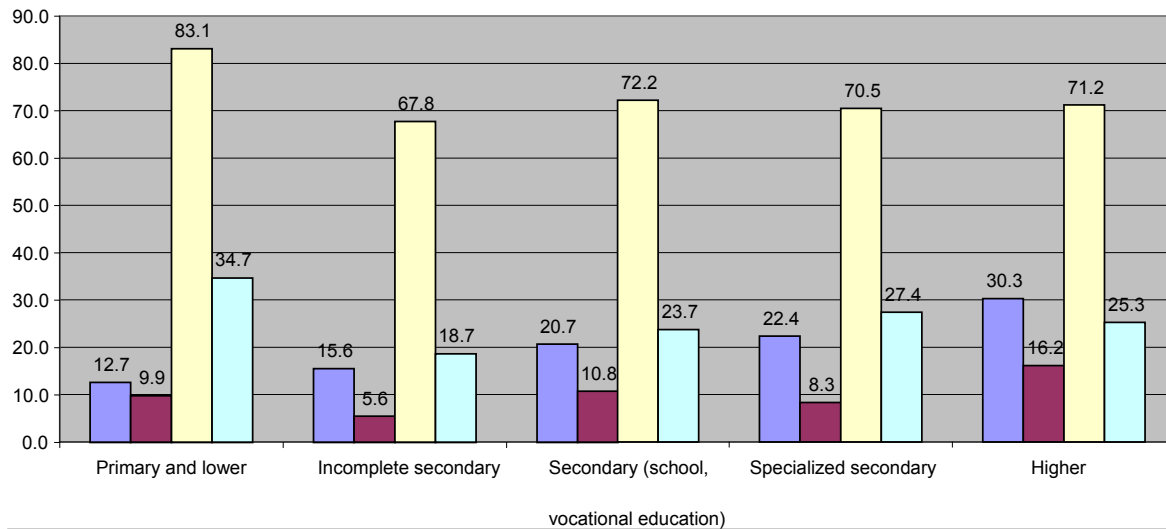
Twenty-two per cent of respondents believe Belarus should develop its relations with NATO, whereas 10.6% think Belarus should join the alliance. The share of those who did not answer was high in both cases – 27.9% and 26%, respectively, which could indicate a shortage of information about NATO and its activity.

At the same time, 43.4% of respondents perceive NATO as a source of military threat (when answering a yes-no question), however, when answering an open-end question, only 6% admitted that NATO poses a threat to Belarus. At the same time, of those respondents who originally claimed that nothing threatened Belarus some did agree that NATO was a threat to Belarus when answering a direct question. The situation suggests that NATO, as seen by Belarusians, is more of a media image, a PR product that is constantly updated by the official propaganda, but is virtually undetectable by the radar of the public consciousness as long as the topic of the “NATO threat” is not stirred up. However, we should note that an expansion of cooperation with NATO would inevitably bring this issue to the foreground in the media domain, bringing back to life the entire complex of stereotypes and phobias. Therefore, it is little wonder that the cooperation between Belarus and NATO may progress only under a total news blackout. Apparently, the Belarusian authorities, even though they reap benefits from their cooperation with NATO, prefer having an “enemy image” up their sleeve just for the sake of propaganda in order to activate the “feeling of insecurity” for foreign political purposes when the right time comes.

The support for cooperation with NATO is interconnected with the social dynamism of respondents: some 28.8% of the respondents aged 18 to 24 support closer ties with NATO, compared to 16.8% of the respondents aged over 65. Almost half of the single “golden per cent” of the richest people of Belarus are in favor of cooperation with NATO, the proportion of closer relations with the alliance falls to 27.7% in the Belarusian “middle class” and further drops to 17.2% in the “poor” group. Minsk residents tend to support collaboration with NATO (33.8%) more than those residing in small and medium towns (19.2%-21%) and in villages (13.9%). Those who have visited the EU more than once in the past three years and those who have access

to alternative media are more inclined to support cooperation with the alliance than other population groups, with 32.6% and 33.6%, respectively. As for Belarus' membership in NATO, although the idea is generally unpopular in the country, 19.1% of young people under 24, 16% of those with higher education, 23.2% of people who frequently visit the EU and 16.7% of those having access to media alternatives would welcome it.

Choice of security pattern depending on education



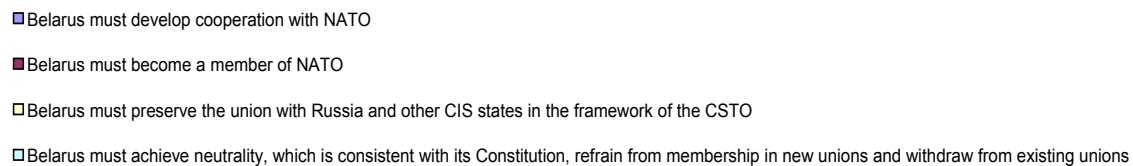
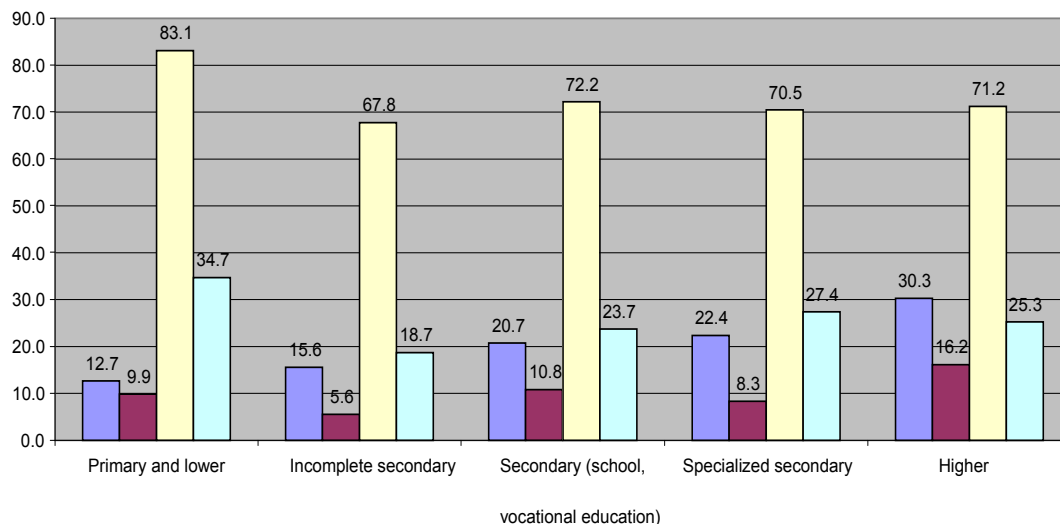
Russia, CIS, CSTO, neutrality

The share of the respondents believing that Belarus should keep the union with Russia and the CIS in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) stands at 71.9%, and only 8.3% disagree, which is slightly fewer than the proportion of those supporting Belarus' membership in NATO. This means some of the respondents believe Belarus could form a union with both military-political blocs.

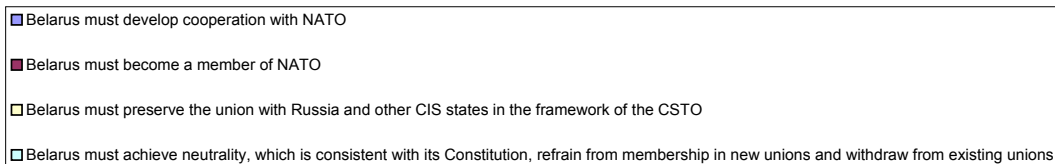
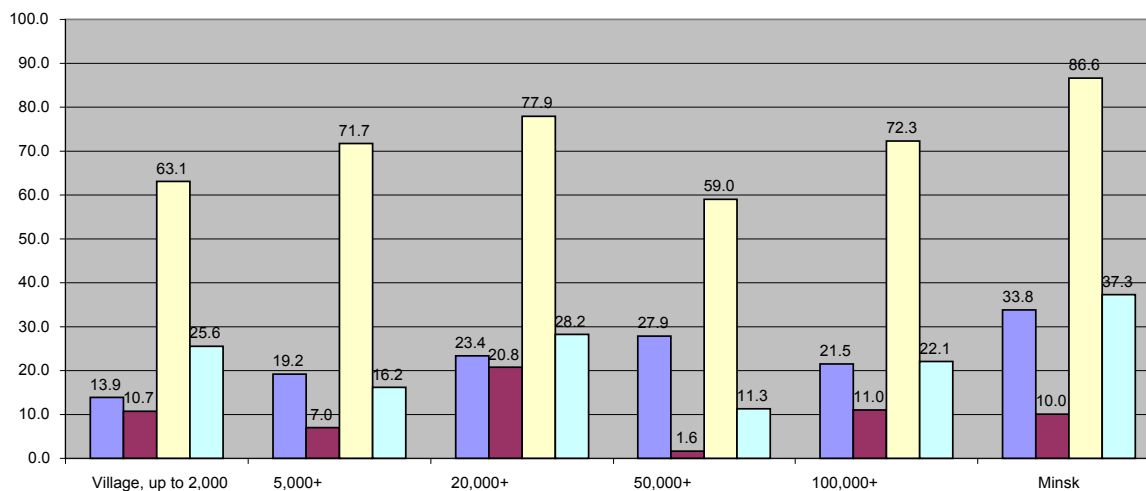
The portrait of the average supporter of Belarus' orientation toward Russia and the CSTO is the opposite of the average supporter of Belarus' union with NATO. However, supporters of the union with Russia dominate in all age and social groups.

The idea that Belarus should become a neutral state and withdraw from existing blocs is backed by 25.2% of respondents. The share of opponents of neutrality is larger by 10 percentage points, at 35.8%. At the same time, 39% of respondents are undecided, which attests to a considerable lag of mass consciousness and low rate of response to changes in the state propaganda. The attitude to neutrality is almost independent of the age and gender of respondents. At the same time, 72% of the respondents that said they preferred neutrality agreed that Belarus should preserve its union with Russia in the scope of the CSTO, which shows a very low degree of understanding of the issue and low level of actualization in collective consciousness – affirmative answers are given to all questions that bear no negative cultural stereotypes. Under the circumstances, opportunities for manipulating public consciousness are virtually unlimited, unless the border of cultural phobias is crossed.

Choice of security pattern depending on education



Choice of security pattern depending on residence



CHAPTER 4. BELARUSIAN TOLERANCE THROUGH THE LENS OF EUROPEAN VALUES

This study aims at correlating the views, values and mindset of contemporary Belarusians with the “ideal type” of European political and civil culture. This correlation will enable us to determine to what extent the geopolitical choice of the Belarusian nation is conditional upon value-based and pragmatic reasons and identify the correlation between the supporters of this or that integration project and bearers of this or that type of political culture corresponding to the given type of geopolitical body.

The various instruments of debunking the myth of Belarusian tolerance that have recently been circulating in the analytical community have become as banal as the assertions about a unique tolerance of the Belarusians some time ago. Tolerance is a purely subjective notion that is interpreted differently in various cultural and historical contexts. In our research, we tried not to “confirm” or “dispel” the “myth” about the tolerance of the Belarusian nation, but to correlate the political and civil culture of Belarusian society with the moral values and principles that form the foundation of the political discourse of the EU and “European values”.

Main conclusions:

- **Belarusian society is to a much greater extent ready to adopt “political” European values** (respect for political and civil freedoms), **than “cultural” values** (respect for personal autonomy, choice of lifestyle, faith, behavior, sexual orientation, etc.).
- In both areas (political and cultural rights and freedoms) **there are serious differences between population groups determined primarily by the *social dynamics of the respondents*** (age, education, experience in communicating with people from other cultures), not the historic and cultural peculiarities, such as the “clash of civilizations”. However, whereas political intolerance starts prevailing only among the respondents of the preretirement age, cultural intolerance is becoming a standard among relatively young people.
- **The three dominating socio-cultural types (authoritarian, conservative and liberal)** may establish the foundation for structuring the political scene should open political competition return to Belarus.
- **There is a marked, albeit not unambiguous, interconnection between the socio-cultural types and the geopolitical choice of Belarusians.** The supporters of the “Russian way” are for the most part bearers of a conservative political culture both in their respect for political rights and freedoms and tolerance for alternative lifestyles. The supporters of the “European way” are more diverse in their cultural types. It appears that, while showing a high level of political tolerance, the two groups are very much different when it comes to “cultural” tolerance.

When juxtaposing the “Belarusian” values, views and stereotypes with those “European”, we are far from sermonizing, and far be it from us to insist on advantages of one “moral coordinate frame” over the other one. We are also well aware that the official political discourse of Brussels may correlate differently with the political and moral views of, say, a Spanish or Polish countryside. However, this comparison is essential for a very simple reason: the degree of community of values defines the depth limit and steadiness of integration projects, which means that the geopolitical choice of society and elites, if they make it in earnest, must be based on the adherence to certain system of values and norms or readiness to accept these values.

The study of “value distance” can therefore be used as a source of important information for supporters of one or another geopolitical or integration project. On the other hand, it transfers the dialogue about political culture and civilizational choice from the domain of slogans (such as “Belarus to Europe”) and dogmatic statements (for instance, the statements of some pro-governmental think tanks that “western values are alien to the Belarusians”) to the domain of substantive discussions based on facts and figures.

Belarusian tolerance: an attempt to measure it

We interpret the European type of political and civil cultures via two dimensions: firstly, it is **respect for political and civil rights and freedoms** and non-resistance to exercise of these rights and freedoms (political tolerance); secondly, it is **respect for personal autonomy of a citizen, his or her right to choose a lifestyle and non-resistance to exercise of this right** (cultural tolerance). We should emphasize that we refer to tolerance literally, that is, to patience for any manifestations of personal freedoms, not approval or disapproval of any actions or recognition of their adoptability for oneself.

When employing the comparison with the benchmark of the “ideal type” of European cultural tolerance (political correctness), **our study reveals a rather wide spread of high intolerance for certain manifestations of individual autonomy and unconventional lifestyles**. For instance, most of Belarusians are either “definitely” (43.2%) or “rather” (19.5%) in favor of criminal prosecution of homosexuals (only 6.2% of respondents agree that the rights of gays should not be limited). Another area of frequently aggressive display of intolerance is people’s attitude to unconventional religions – 36.7% absolutely agree and 20.1% rather agree that the state should limit their penetration in Belarus, whereas only 9.2% of respondents believe the state should not interfere in people’s choice of faith. At the same time, most of respondents argue against the interference of church in state policy. One more “hot spot” is Belarusians’ attitude to “aliens”. Whereas the attitude to labor migration (46% of the respondents support its restriction in some way or another) will hardly make Belarusians stand out among other European or non-European country, the fact that over 20% of respondents would be ready to do their best to dissolve a hypothetical marriage of their offspring to a representative of another race indicates rather widely spread racial stereotypes in Belarusian society. Still, Belarusians show higher tolerance for the cultural rights of migrants (which might be a result of their national-cultural nihilism) and reproductive rights of women (however, almost a quarter of respondents support restrictions on abortion rights).

	Fully agree with the first statement	Rather agree with the first statement	Disagree with both	Rather agree with the second statement	Fully agree with the second statement	
The state must restrict penetration of unconventional confessions in Belarus, such as Krishnaists, Bahaists, etc.	36.7	20.1	21.2	12.4	9.3	The state must not influence the choice of faith, even if unconventional confessions are spread in Belarus
Homosexuals must be banned and legally prosecuted, just as in Soviet times	43.2	19.5	20.2	10.6	6.2	The rights of people with nontraditional sexual orientation must not be restricted
Abortion must be banned and be punishable by law	13.8	11.8	33.4	20.4	20.6	Women must be entitled to abortion
Persons coming to Belarus from other countries must completely assimilate, adopt the culture and traditions of the country where they live	13.4	19	28.3	23.6	15.6	Persons coming to Belarus from abroad have the right to cherish their culture and traditions however different from those Belarusian
The state must restrict labor migration inflow	20.5	26.9	31.1	14.9	6.3	The state must encourage labor migration from abroad
Church must have more influence on state policy	9.4	12.7	34.3	17.7	26	Church must be separated from the state

Belarusians definitely more correspond to the European type of political tolerance than cultural political correctness. The study shows a high enough level of respect for civil political rights of fellow citizens, such as academic freedom (only 15.4% of respondents approve of the state policy in limiting international contacts of students and professors), right to disagree with the policy of the state (19% support a ban on nonconformists, whereas 48.8% are against it), freedom of business (60.7% of the respondents call for more freedom in doing business, and only 18.4% argue against it). The majority of respondents see no need for limitations of political or civil rights, even if they are misused. At the same time, over 40% of Belarusians are to a greater or lesser degree ready to agree that censorship for the sake of prevention of extremism is necessary; 32% are ready to restrain the activity of the opposition (35% are against it); and 28.9% see no need for political parties (while 33.1% call for a more prominent role of parties in Belarus).

	Fully agree with the first statement	Rather agree with the first statement	Disagree with both	Rather agree with the second statement	Fully agree with the second statement	
The state must be entitled to deny people who disagree with state policies and criticize them jobs in state authorities, education and some other services	5.1	14.4	31.3	23.7	25.1	Disagreement with policies pursued by the state and public criticism of the authorities cannot be a reason to deny jobs, posts or education
Censorship in the media is acceptable for the sake of combating extremism and anti-state ideas	17.1	24.8	30.9	15.1	11.7	Censorship in the media is unacceptable and must be banned

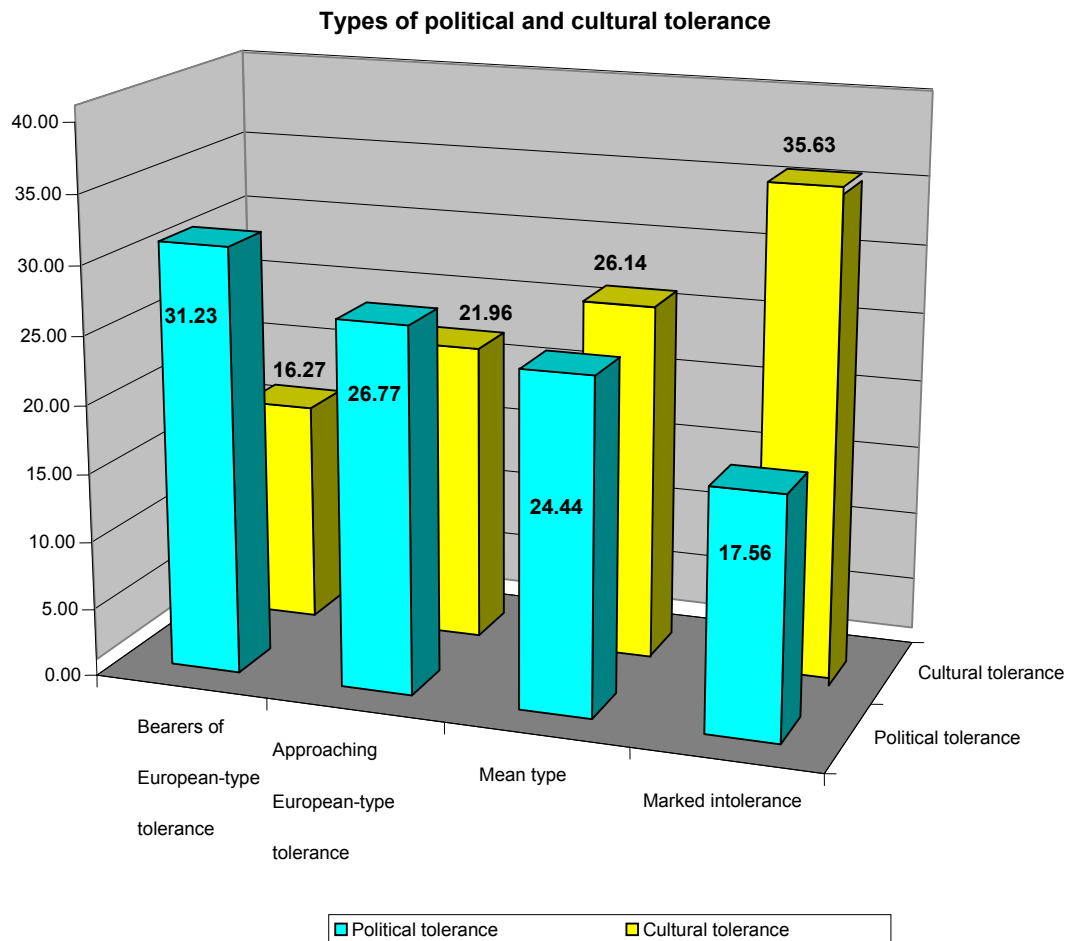
Opposition activities must be restricted	12.7	20.1	30.5	16.9	20.1	There must be no obstacles to opposition activities
The state must establish strict control over business	5.5	13.1	20.3	27.3	33.4	The state must give more freedom to business
The state must secure order and stability in society using rigid measures, even to the prejudice of some rights and freedoms	8.0	18.5	31.1	25.3	16.0	The state must respect rights and freedoms of citizens, even if they sometimes misuse these rights
The state must restrict international contacts of students and professors to prevent brain drain	7.2	8.2	18.3	28.9	37.5	The state must encourage international contacts of students and professors to improve the quality of education and broaden outlooks
There is no need for an increased role of political parties	12.1	16.8	37.5	16.8	16.3	It is necessary to increase the role of political parties

Based on our findings, we calculated a sort of “index” of cultural and political tolerance. In each case, we chose five questions and noted whether a respondent supports limitations on exercise of rights in the given domain (agreement was marked as 0 and disagreement as 1)¹.

According to the formula, if a respondent scored five points, he or she corresponded completely with the European type of political or cultural tolerance². A respondent scoring four points is considered “approaching” that type, and those with three points are considered “transition types”. The respondents supporting restrictions in most cases (two points and less) are regarded as bearers of the authoritarian type.

1 For instance, the question about criminal prosecution of homosexuals was coded in the following way: the answers “totally agree” and “rather agree” were coded as “0” (manifestation of intolerance); the rest of the answers, including “no answer” were coded as “1” (manifestation of tolerance). In the question about interracial marriages, only the answer that the respondent “is going to do his or her best to dissolve the marriage” was coded as “0”. Our system therefore tends to overstate the real degree of tolerance in the country by including those who have doubts and who provided no answer in the group of tolerant respondents.

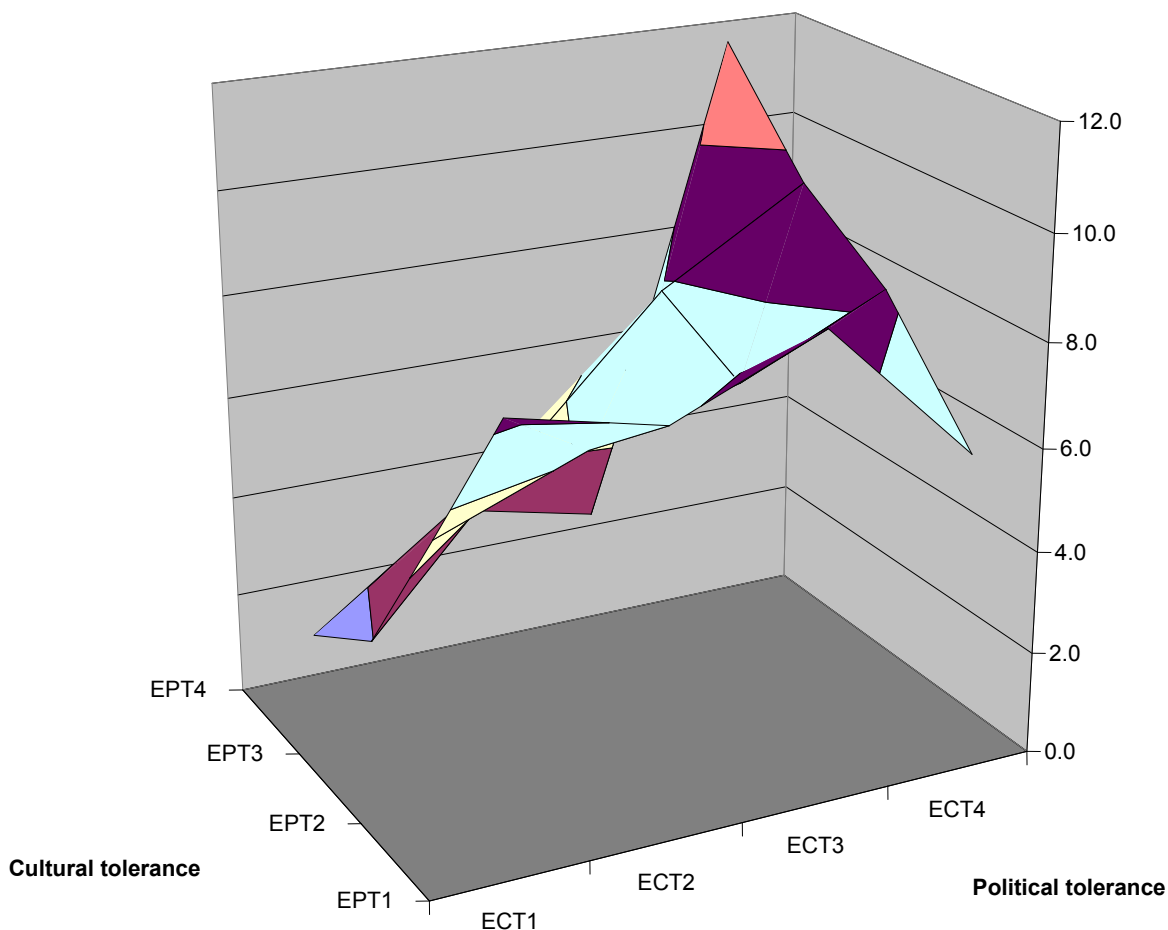
2 The degree of cultural tolerance was calculated based on the answers to the questions “The state must restrain the penetration of unconventional religions in Belarus”, “Homosexuality must be banned and criminally prosecuted, just as in the Soviet times”, “Abortions must be banned and subject to legal prosecution”, “Persons who come to live in Belarus must fully assimilate and adopt the culture and practices of the country where they live, otherwise they must leave”, and the question that helps determine the attitude to a hypothetical interracial marriage of an offspring. The degree of political tolerance is calculated based on answers to the questions: “The state must limit international contacts of students and professors in order to prevent brain drain”, “Censorship in the media is acceptable for the sake of combating extremism”, “Activity of the opposition must be restricted”, “The state is entitled not to employ persons who publicly disagree with the policy of the state or deny them university entrance”, and “The state must secure order and stability in society, even though to the prejudice of some rights and freedoms”. The answers “totally agree” and “rather agree” were coded as “intolerance”.



The diagram shows that Belarusian society tends to the European types of political culture; at the same time, there is a substantial gap between the degrees of cultural tolerance. We will refrain from far-reaching conclusions, which could be drawn from the low level of cultural tolerance of the contemporary Belarusians (homophobia, suspicion of untraditional faiths) – such conclusions require a comparison of value systems, world outlook and stereotypes of Belarusians and Europeans, especially representing the new EU members; analysis of data on transformation of value orientations of “old” Europeans over the past 30-40 years. We should also note the difference between the value and settings on the one side and real actions on the other (in other words, one may hate someone without ever taking any action against him or her). Anyway, we believe the potential scenarios of the geopolitical choice have apparent problem areas.

Also note the three dominants in collective consciousness that we revealed after correlating the levels of political and cultural tolerance – the biggest authoritarian (corner EPT4-ECT4, in other words, the prevalence of authoritarian political and cultural ideas), the smaller liberal (corner EPT1-ECT1), and the smallest Christian-democratic (EPT1-ECT3, a combination of democratic political values and cultural conservatism). Possibly, it will be the breakdown along these value orientations that will structure the political field of Belarus if real political competition emerges in the country.

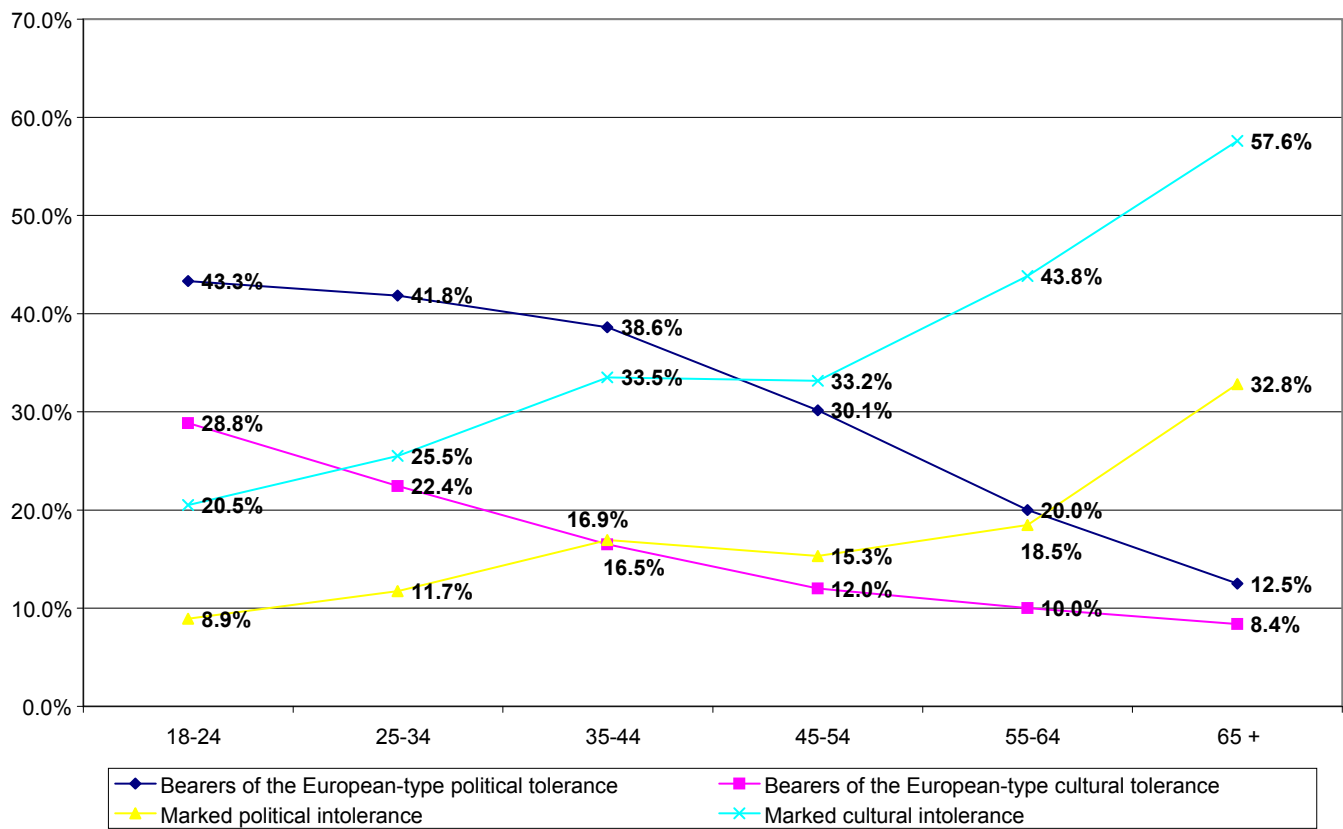
Balance of cultural and political tolerance



European values and Belarusian reality: convergence – a matter of time or “we have our peculiar culture”?

To what extent can these political culture types be adjusted? Predictably, the table shows that the level of both political and cultural tolerance is in inverse ratio to the age of respondents. However, while liberal political values are a standard for the young, we cannot say the same about their respect for alternative lifestyles and cultural rights. **It is indicative that whereas the break point in the context of political values (when authoritarian values prevail over those liberal) is observed in the generation aged 55-64, the break point in the framework of cultural values is shifted to a generation some 35 years younger.**

Political and cultural tolerance depending on age

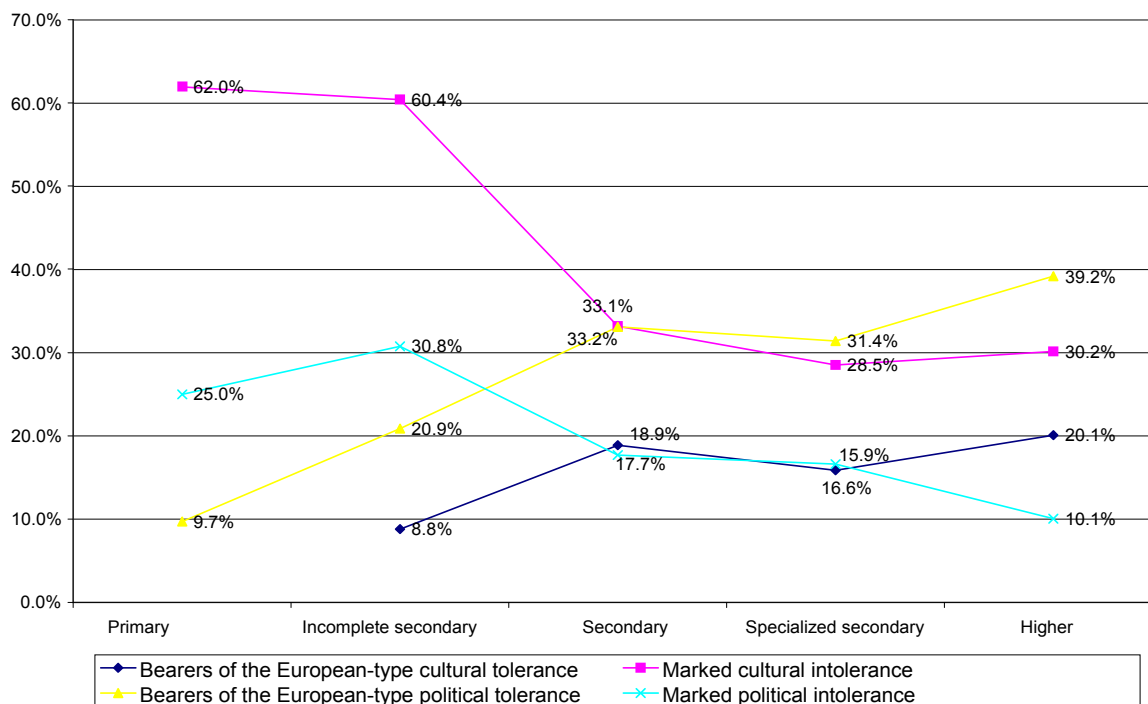


This pronounced generational factor in the definition of the political culture types may be interpreted in various ways. One of the most widely spread theories in modern sociology is that of “formative age”, which suggests that basic life and political values are molded in a person when he or she develops as a personality, and are kept virtually unchanged throughout his or her life. According to this concept, the political culture of each generation is an “imprint” of their youth, dominating moods of that time. The political culture of contemporary young people is therefore the culture of pensioners 30 years from now. However, longitudinal studies are required to confirm this hypothesis, and no such studies have been conducted yet.

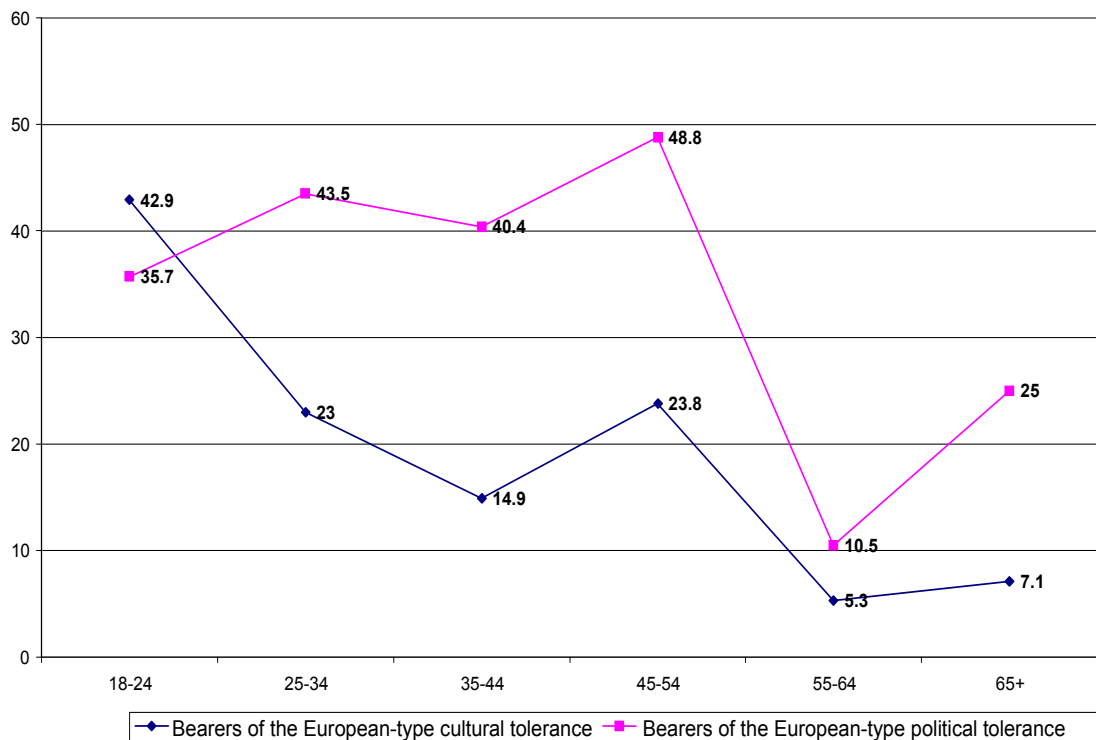
On the other hand, one can suggest that in societies similar to Belarus, the liberal nature of political culture is “dispersed” with age as respondents lose their social dynamism while their world outlook narrows. Again, this theory can only be corroborated by a solid research tradition, which we are trying to found.

Similar trends are revealed in the correlation between the degree of tolerance and education of the respondents – we should note that in this case cultural intolerance prevails even among the respondents with higher education. Education is therefore hardly a factor that can “stabilize” political culture, especially as far as cultural tolerance is concerned.

Political and cultural tolerance depending on education



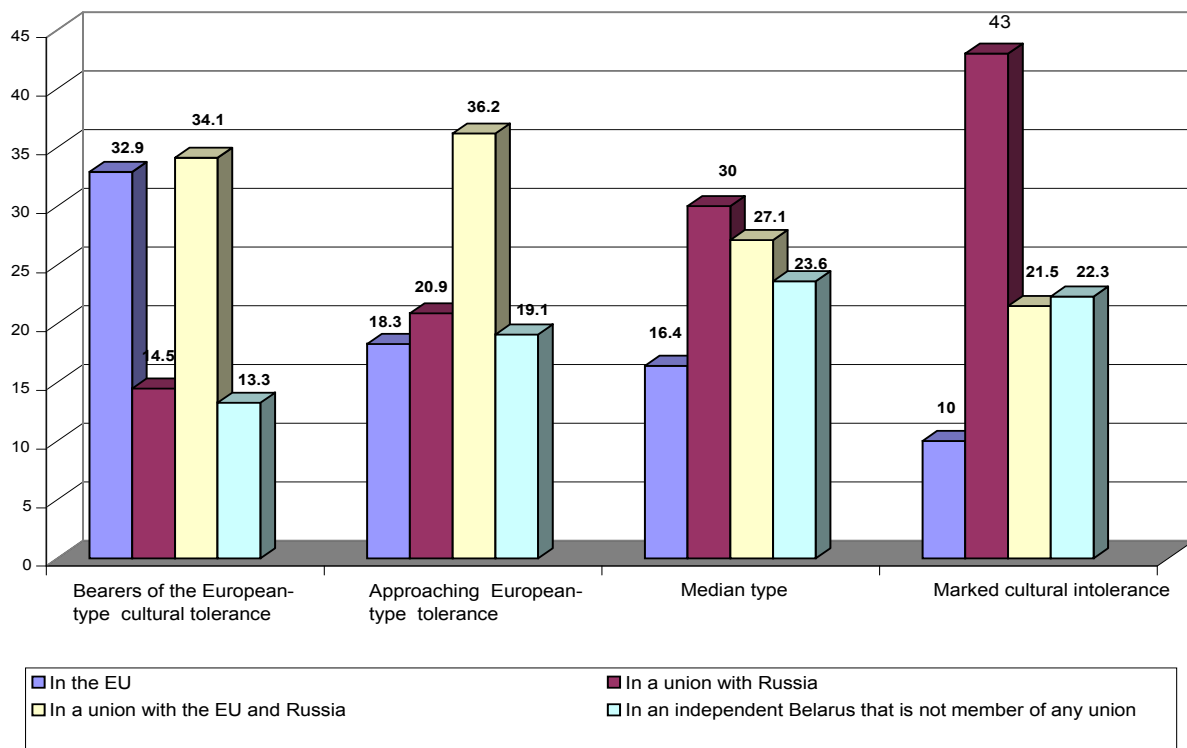
Political and cultural tolerance in the group of the respondents with higher education, in age groups



European choice and European values: an ambiguous interconnection

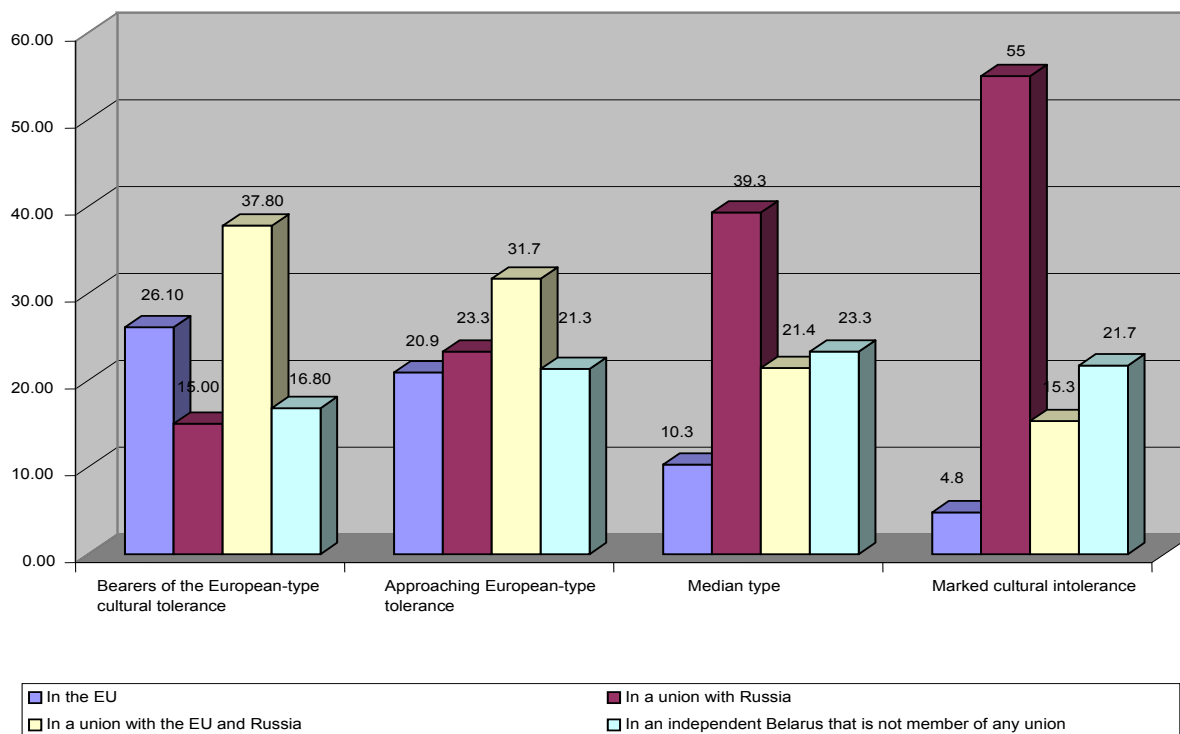
Finally, note that the interconnection between the type of political and civil culture and geopolitical preferences is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, the choice of a union with Russia and autarchy (independent Belarus that is not member of any union) clearly correlates with both political and cultural intolerance. The bearers of the European type of values are divided between the choice of a union with the EU or a union with the EU and Russia at the same time. The four types of the geopolitical choice are grouped into two pairs by the socio-cultural types of the respondents (the first, liberal one, unites the supporters of unions with the EU and EU and Russia simultaneously, whereas the second, authoritarian one, combines the advocates of a union with Russia and an independent Belarus that is not a member of any alliances).

Geopolitical orientations depending on the level of cultural tolerance
Answer to the question: "You would prefer living..."

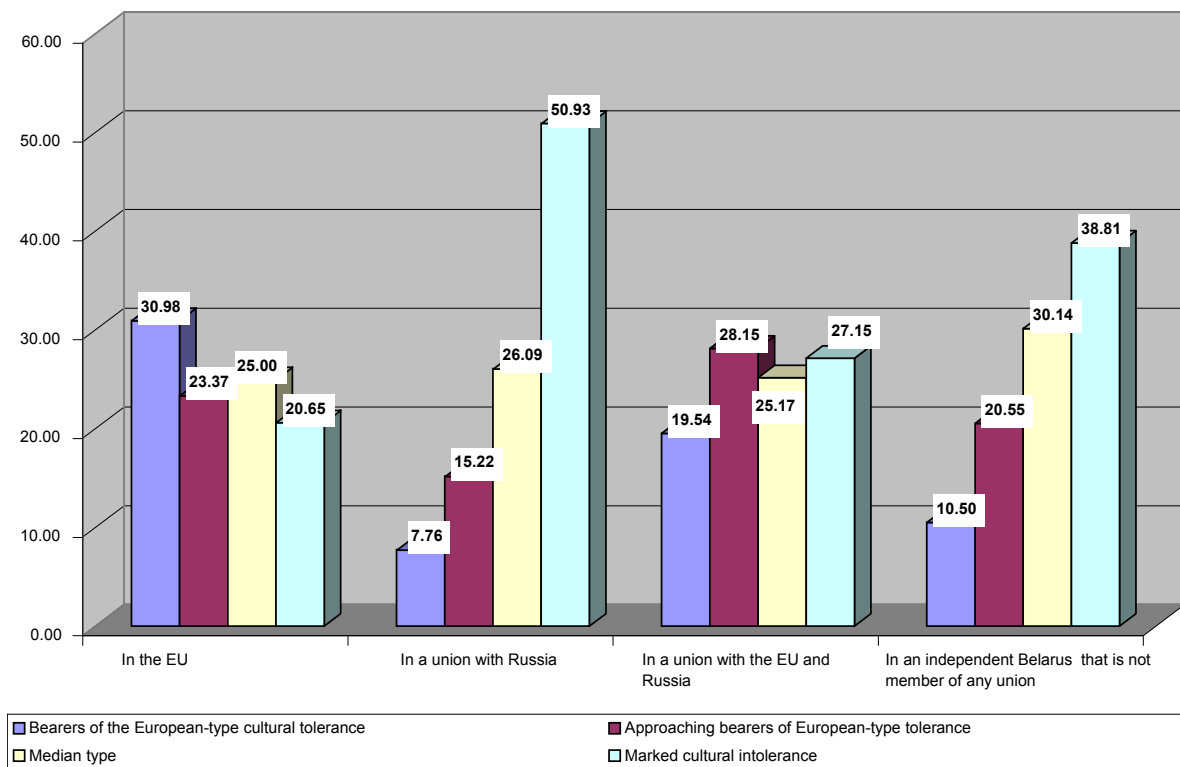


We have ascertained that a definite type of political culture logically implies a geopolitical choice (liberal culture leads to "European" options, with or without Russia, and authoritarian culture prompts the bearer to opt for the early or late "Lukashenko-style" scenarios). The inverse relationship is less manifested, though. We can safely say that respondents with a marked cultural intolerance dominate in the group of those choosing Russia or the Lukashenko-ist version of an independent and non-European Belarus. However, we cannot say with certainty that the advocates of the European choice are absolute cultural liberals, or that supporters of Lukashenko's geopolitical options are total autocrats in the political sense. This is why many supporters of European life may come across such aspects of European life that they will hardly be able to digest.

Geopolitical orientations depending on the level of political tolerance
Answer to the question: "You would prefer living..."



Level of cultural tolerance depending on geopolitical choices



Level of political tolerance depending on geopolitical choices

